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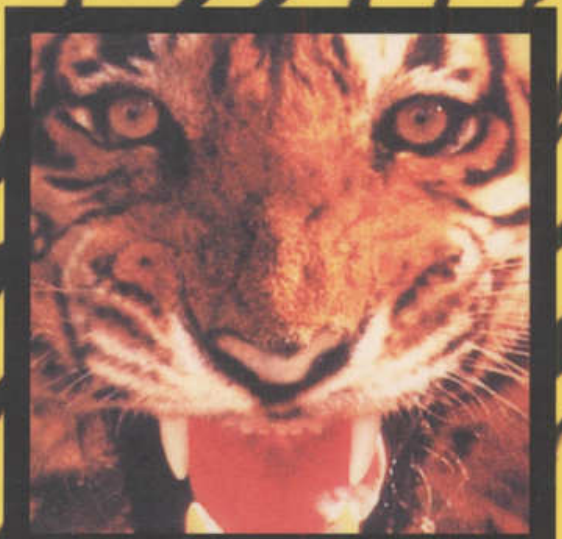

OMNIBUS

VOLUME 2

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THE TIGER ROARS
JUNGLES LONG AGO

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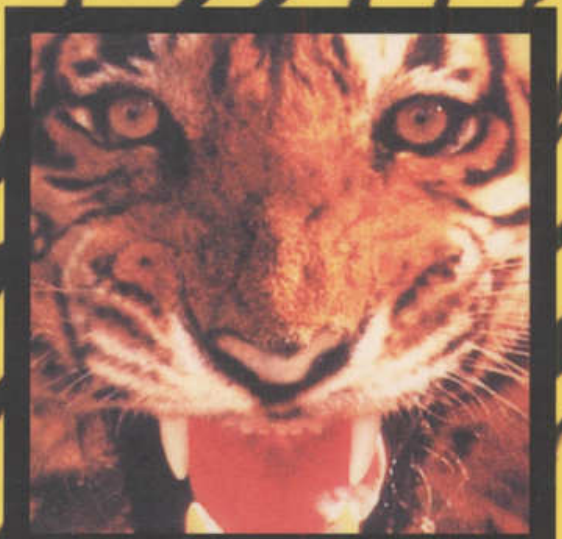

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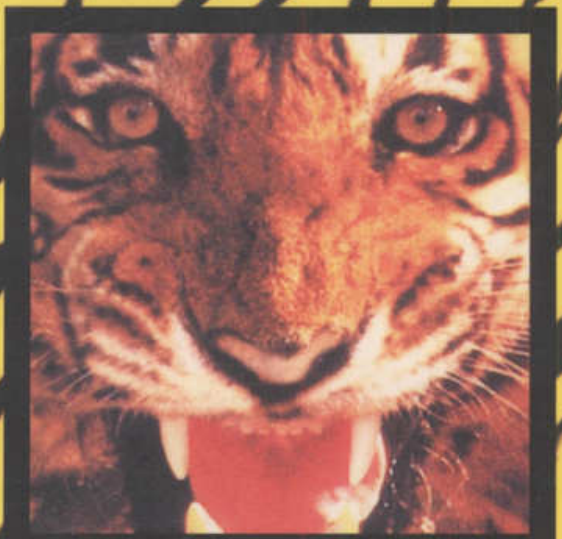

OMNIBUS

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THE TIGER ROARS
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Nine Man-Eaters

and One Rogue

Kenneth Anderson

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Nine man-eaters and one rogue

by Kenneth Anderson

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1955

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To the memory of the jungles of Southern India, their birds and animals, particularly elephant, tiger and panther, and their forest-people, Chensoos, Sholagas, Karumbas and Poojarees, I proudly and gratefully dedicate this book, in return for the twenty-five years of unadulterated joy they have given me in making and keeping their acquaintance.

Tiger actually killing a bull (taken from a machan)

Introduction

THE Man-Eating Tiger is an abnormality, for under normal circumstances, the King of the Indian Jungles is a gentle man and of noble nature. He kills only for food, never wantonly, and his prey are the wild beasts of the forest, or, where temptation offers, the village cattle that are sent to graze in the Government Reserves.

Occasionally a tigress will teach her half-grown cub, or cubs, the art of killing their prey in the way a tiger should kill by breaking the vertebrae of the neck. Under such special circumstances three or four cattle may be killed at a time, to provide practice for the youngsters, but such slaughter is never performed wantonly by a single tiger for the sheer joy of slaying. A tigress normally brings up two cubs at a time although I have personally seen four and it is said that the male limits the species by eating half the

litter shortly after their birth. The tiger's skill in breaking the neck of its prey, in contrast to the method of leopards and panthers, which strangle their prey by seizing its throat and holding on, has often been debated by hunters. In fact, when attacking, the tiger rises up besides its victim, generally places a paw over its shoulder and seizes the beast by the back of the neck or throat, according to its size, pressing the head to the ground. The paw is then used as a lever to cause the victim to topple over itself, while the tiger continues to hold the head down. Thus, the weight of the animal's own body is the factor that breaks the neck rather than any twisting action by the tiger, although I am personally of the opinion that the latter does exist to a considerable extent. Because of the tiger's ability to open its jaws very widely, it is some times difficult to judge whether the prey was seized by the back of its neck or by the throat, the fang marks being so positioned that either could have happened.

The panther and leopard are for all practical purposes the same animal although even here much argument has arisen from the great contrast in size between the 'Thendu', or forest variety of panther, which kills its prey by breaking the neck after the manner of a tiger, for which it is sometimes mistaken, and the smaller variety of leopard haunting the outskirts of villages, which kills goats and dogs by strangling, and even descends to feeding on rats and domestic fowls. The panther is a much less powerful animal than the tiger, generally of a cowardly disposition, but nevertheless one of the most picturesque inhabitants of the forests of the Indian Peninsula, and of Asia and Africa.

Man-eaters of both varieties have generally been created by the interference of the human race. A tiger or panther is sometimes so incapacitated by a rifle or gunshot wound as to be rendered incapable, thereafter, of stalking and killing the wild animals of the forest or even cattle that are its usual prey. By force of circumstance, therefore, it descends to killing man, the weakest and puniest of creatures, quite incapable of defending himself when unarmed. The same incapacity may sometimes occur through accidental injury, such as a porcupine quill in the foot; and some times the habit of man-eating is passed on by a tigress to her cubs. Occasionally the taste for human flesh is acquired by a panther that has devoured corpses that have been thrown into the forest, as happens when epidemic diseases attack villages in those areas, though this is very uncommon. Equally rare are instances where none of these circumstances appears to account for the propensity.

A man-eating tiger, or panther, when it exists, is a scourge and terror to the neighborhood. The villagers are defenseless and appear to resign themselves to their fate. Victims are killed regularly, both by day and night if the killer is a tiger, and by night only if a panther, the former often repeatedly following a particular circuit over the same area. While the death roll increases, superstition and demoralization play a very considerable part in preventing the villagers from taking any concerted, planned action against their adversary. Roads are deserted, village traffic comes to a stop, forest operations, woodcutting and cattle grazing cease completely, fields are left uncultivated, and sometimes whole villages are abandoned for safer areas.

The greatest difficulty experienced in attempting to shoot such animals is the extraordinary lack of co-operation evinced by the surrounding villagers, actuated as they are by a superstitious fear of retribution by the man-eater, whom they believe will mysteriously come to learn of the part they have attempted to play against it.

A 'rogue' elephant is generally the result of the periodic disease of 'musth', from which all male elephants suffer for a period of about 90 days. An oily discharge from an orifice behind the eye is the outward evidence. They are then extremely aggressive and dangerous, but afterwards they generally regain their normal harmless composure. Some times it is the result of a particularly ambitious young elephant coming into battle with the big tuskers of a herd for the favor of a female, when he gets badly beaten up and expelled by the larger beasts. He then becomes very morose and surly, and takes his revenge on whatever he comes across again, the easiest being man.

It must not be imagined, however, that the forests of India are always stocked with man-eating tigers and leopards, or rogue elephants. Generally they do not exist, and the jungles are then safer to wander in than any busy street of a capital city, where the possibility of being run over by motor traffic at any moment is considerable.

Further, the beauties of nature, of the flowers, insects, birds and animals the glories of an Indian jungle dawn, and of the glowing red sunset, and of the silvery moon-lit night that bathes the swaying tops of feathery bamboos the mystery of the dark nights, the sky set with a myriad stars above all the peaceful solitude and sense of nearness to Nature and to God, fill the wanderer with an assurance that he has at last found a home, from which he will not willingly be torn.

I hope I may be forgiven if, in some of these stories, I have devoted considerable space to geographical and natural descriptions and conditions, and have tried to mimic, in writing, the calls of birds and beasts of the forest. I have done so deliberately, in an attempt to recapture, for the benefit of some of my readers who have been in India and have visited her glorious forests, memories of those days and of those jungles from which I am sure they are sorry to have been separated. I dread the day when that separation must come to me.

In closing, I have to record my grateful thanks to my late father, who taught me how to use a gun when I was seven; although he was not a jungle-lover himself, he delighted in shooting duck, partridge and small game. My thanks are due also to Byra, a wild Poojaree whom I discovered living in a burrow on the banks of the Chinar River in the district of Salem; more than twenty-five years ago, he taught me most of what I now know about the jungle and its fauna, and bred in me a deep love of his home in the wilds. I am grateful, too, to Ranga, my faithful old 'Shikaree', also of the Salem District, who has accompanied me on many trips, has patiently looked after me, guided me, helped me and been staunchly faithful and fearless in the face of danger; Sowree, his assistant and almost his equal in shikaring; and my old hunting friends, Dick Bird and Pat Watson, who between them have killed more tiger than any men I know, for their many tips and instructions in my early days.

KENNETH
ANDERSON

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The Man-Eater of Jowlagiri

THOSE who have been to the tropics and to jungle places will not need to be told of the beauties of the moonlight over hill and valley, that picks out in vivid relief the forest grasses and each leaf of the giant trees, and throws into still greater mystery the dark shadows below, where the rays of the moon cannot reach, concealing perhaps a beast of prey, a watchful deer or a lurking reptile, all individually and severally in search of food.

All appeared peaceful in the Jowlagiri Forest Range, yet there was danger everywhere, and murder was afoot. For a trio of poachers, who possessed between them two matchlocks of ancient vintage, had decided to get them selves some meat. They had cleverly constructed a hide on the sloping banks of a water hole, and had been sitting in it since sunset, intently watchful for the deer, which, sooner or later, must come to slake their thirst.

The hours wore on. The moon, at the full, had reached mid-heaven and the scene was as bright as day. Suddenly, from the thicket of evergreen saplings to their left, could be heard the sound of violently rustling leaves and deep throated grunts. What could be there? Wild-pig undoubtedly! A succulent meal, and flesh in addition that could be sold! The poachers waited, but the beasts, whatever they were, did not break cover. Becoming impatient, Muniappa, the marksman of the trio, decided to risk a shot. Raising his matchlock, he waited till a dark shadow, deeper than its surroundings, became more evident, and fired. There was a snarling roar and a lashing of bushes, followed by a series of coughing 'whoofs' and then silence.

Not pigs, but a tiger! Fearfully and silently, the three poachers beat a hasty retreat to their village, there to spend the rest of the night in anxiety as to the result of their act. But morning revealed that all was apparently well, for a male tiger just in his prime lay dead, the chance shot from the ancient musket having sped straight to his heart. So Muniappa and his friends were, for that day, the unsung and whispered heroes of the village.

But the next night produced a different story. With sunset came the urgent, angry call of a tigress seeking her dead mate. For it was the mating season, and this tigress, which had only just succeeded in finding her companion the night before, was decidedly annoyed at his unaccountable absence, which she quite rightly connected with the interference of human beings.

Night after night for a week, she continued her uneasy movements, calling by day from the depths of the forest and in darkness roaring

almost at the outskirts of the village itself. Young Jack Leonard, who was keen to secure a trophy, and who had been summoned to the village by an urgent letter, arrived on the morning of the eighth day, and acquainted himself with the situation. Being told that the tiger wandered everywhere, and seeing her many pugmarks on the lonely path to the forest-bungalow, he decided to try his luck that evening, concealing himself by five o'clock behind an anthill that stood conveniently be side the path.

The minutes passed, and at 6.15 p.m., dusk was falling. Suddenly there was a faint rustle of leaves and a loose stone rolled down the bank a little to his right. Leonard strained his eyes for the first sight of the tigress, but nothing happened. The minutes passed again. And then, rapidly moving along the edge of the road towards him, and on the same side as himself, he could just discern the form of the tigress. Hastily transferring the stock of his rifle to his left shoulder, and leaning as far out from his sheltering bush as possible, so that he might see more of the animal, Leonard fired at her chest what would have been a fatal shot had it carried a little more to the right.

As it was, Leonard's bullet ploughed deeply into the right shoulder, causing the beast to roar loudly before crashing away into the jungle. Bitterly disappointed, Leonard waited till morning to follow the trail. There was abundance of blood everywhere, but due to the rocky and difficult country, interspersed with densely wooded ravines and close, impenetrable shrubbery, he failed to catch up with his quarry.

Months passed, and the scene changes to Sulekunta, a village deeper in the forest and about seven miles from Jowlagiri, where there was a little temple occasionally visited by pilgrims from the surrounding region. Three of these had finished their devotions and were returning to their home: a man, his wife and son aged sixteen. Passing under a wild tamarind tree, hardly a quarter-mile from the temple, the boy lingered to pick some of the half-ripe acid fruit. The parents heard a low growl, followed by a piercing, agonized scream, and looked back to see their son carried bodily in the jaws of a tiger, as it leapt into a nullah bordering the lonely path. The aged couple bravely turned back and shouted abuse at the marauder as best they could, only to be answered by two more shrieks from their only son, and then all was silent again.

Thereafter, death followed death over a wide area, extending from Jowlagiri in the extreme north to the cattle pen of Gundalam, thirty miles to the south; and from the borders of Mysore State, twenty miles to the west, to the main road to Denkaflikota, for about forty-five miles

of its length. Some fifteen victims, including three girls, one just married, had fallen a prey to this monster, when I received an urgent summons from my friend, the Sub-Collector of Hosur, to rid the area of the scourge.

Journeying to Jowlagiri, where the Sub-Collector had told me the trouble had begun, I pieced together the facts of the story, deducing that this was no tiger but a tigress, and the one that had been robbed of her mate by the poachers and later wounded by Leonard's plucky but unfortunate shot. From Jowlagiri I tramped to Sulekunta in the hope of coming across the fresh pug marks of the marauder, but I was unlucky, as no kills had occurred at that place in recent days, and what tracks there were had been obliterated by passing herds of cattle. Moving on to Gundalam, twenty-three miles away at the southern limit of the affected area, I decided to pitch camp, since it was at this cattle-pen that the majority of kills had been reported, seven herdsmen being accounted for in the last four months.

Three fat buffalo calves had been very thoughtfully provided as bait by my friend the Sub-Collector; I proceeded to tie them out at likely spots in the hope of securing a kill The first I tethered a mile down the river bordering Gundalam at that time of the year a mere trickle of water at a point where the river was joined by a tributary named Sige Halla, down which the tigress was reported to keep her beat; the second I tied along the path to the neighboring village of Anchetty, four miles away; the remaining calf I secured close to the watershed, whence both herds men and cattle obtained their daily supply of drinking water.

Having myself attended to the securing and comfort of these three baits, I spent the next two days in tramping the forest in every direction, armed with my .405 Winchester, in the hope of picking up fresh pugmarks, or perhaps of seeing the man-eater herself.

Early in the morning of the second day, I located the footprints of the tigress in the soft sand of the Gundalam River. She had descended in the night, walked along the river past the watershed and my buffalo bait, which, as was evident by her footprints, she had stopped to look at but had not even touched, and up and across a neighboring hill on her way to Anchetty. Here the ground became too hard for further tracking. The third morning found me searching again, and I had just returned to camp, preparatory to a hot bath and early lunch, when a group of men, accompanied by the headman of Anchetty, arrived to inform me that the tigress had killed a man early that morning at a hamlet scarcely a mile south of Anchetty. Apparently, a villager, hearing restless sounds from his penned cattle, had gone out at dawn

to investigate and had not returned. Thereafter his brother and son had followed to find out the cause of his absence, and at the outskirts of the cattle-pen had found the man's blanket and staff, and, indistinct in the hard earth, the claw marks of the tigress's hind-feet as she reared to attack her victim. Being too alarmed to follow, they had fled to the hamlet and thence to Anchetty, where, gathering strength in numbers and accompanied by the headman, they had hastened to find me.

Foregoing the bath and swallowing a quick lunch, we hastened to Anchetty and the hamlet. From the spot where the tigress had attacked and as was evident by the fact that no sound had been made by the unfortunate man had killed her victim, tracking became arduous and slow, owing to the hard and stony nature of the ground. In this case, the profusion of thorny bushes among the shrubbery assisted us; for, on casting around, we found shreds of the man's loincloth impaled on the thorns as the tigress carried him away. Had the circumstances not been so tragic, it was instructive to learn how the sagacious animal had endeavored to avoid such thorns and the obstruction they would have offered.

Some 300 yards away she had dropped her burden beneath a thicket at the foot of a small fig tree, probably intending to start her meal. Then she had changed her mind, or perhaps been disturbed, for she had picked her victim up again and continued her retreat towards a deep nullah that ran southwards towards the main Cauvery River, some thirty miles away. Thereafter, tracking became easier, for the tigress had changed her hold from the man's neck and throat; this had accounted for the lack of blood-spoor. Now she held him by the small of his back. Drops of blood, and smears across the leaves of bushes and thickets, now made it comparatively easy for us to follow the trail, and in another hundred yards we had found the man's loincloth, which had completely unwound itself and was hanging from a protruding sprig of 'wait-a-bit' thorn.

Continuing, we reached the nullah where, in the soft dry sand, the pugs of the tigress were clearly imprinted, with a slight drag-mark to one side, evidently caused by one of the man's feet trailing downwards as he was carried. As there was no need of a tracker, and numbers would create disturbance, apart from needless risk, I crept cautiously forward alone, after motioning to the rest to remain where they were. Progress was of necessity very slow, for I had carefully to scan the heavy undergrowth on both banks of the nullah, where the tigress might have been lurking, waiting to put an end to her pursuer. Thus I had traversed two bends in the nullah when I sighted a low out crop of rock jutting into the nullah-bed itself. Keeping as far as possible to the

opposite side of the rock, I increased the stealth of my approach. Scrutiny revealed a dark object on the far side of the rock, and this duly proved to be the body of the unfortunate victim.

The tigress had already made a fair meal, having consumed about half her prey in the process, severing one leg from the thigh and one arm. Having assured myself that she was nowhere in the vicinity, I returned to the men, whom I summoned to the spot to help construct some sort of place where I might sit up and await the return of the assassin to its gruesome meal, which I was confident would be before sunset that day. A more unsuitable spot for sitting-up could hardly be imagined. There was a complete absence of trees on which a hide or machan could be constructed, and it soon became evident that there were only two possibilities. One was to sit close to the opposite bank of the nullah, from where the human victim was clearly visible. The other was to ascend the sloping outcrop of rock to a point some ten feet above the bed of the nullah, where a natural ledge was formed about four feet from its upper edge. The first plan I rejected, as being too dangerous in the case of a man-eater, and this left me with the prospect of sitting upon the Rockledge, from where I could not only view the cadaver but the whole length of the nullah up to its bend in the direction from which we had come, and for about twenty yards in the other direction, where it swung abruptly to the right.

Working silently and quickly, at a spot some distance up the nullah, whence the sound of lopping would not be heard, the men cut a few thorny branches of the same variety as grew in the immediate vicinity of the rock, so as not to cause a contrasting background. These they deftly and cunningly arranged below the ledge, so that I would not be visible in any direction from the nullah itself. Fortunately I had had the forethought to bring my blanket, water bottle and torch, although there would not be much use for the last of these during the major portion of the night, as the moon was nearing full and would rise comparatively early. By 3 p.m. I was in my place and the men left me, having been instructed to return next morning with a flask of hot tea, and sandwiches for a quick snack. The afternoon wore slowly on, the heat from the blazing sun beating directly on the exposed rock and bathing me in sweat. Looking down the nullah in both directions, all was still and nothing disturbed the rays of shimmering heat that arose from the baked earth. Absence of vultures could be accounted for by the fact that, in the position the tigress had left it beneath the sharply sloping rock, the body was hidden from the sky. About 5 p.m., a crow spotted it, and by its persistent cawing soon attracted its mate. But the two birds were too nervous of the human scent actually to begin picking the kill. Time wore on, and the sun set as a fiery ball beneath the

distant rim of forest-clad hills.

The crows flapped away, one after the other, to roost in readiness on some distant tree in expectation of the morrow when, overcome by hunger, they would be more equal to braving the feared smell of human beings. The cheering call of the jungle-cock broke forth in all directions as a farewell to the dying day, and the strident 'ma-ow' of a peacock sounded from down the dry bed of the stream. I welcomed the sound, for I knew that in the whole forest no more alert watchman than a peacock could be found and that he would warn me immediately of the tigress's approach, should he see her. Now was the expected time, and with every sense intently alert, I awaited the return of the man-killer. But nothing happened, the peacock flapped heavily away and dusk rapidly followed the vanquished day.

Fortunately the early moon had already risen and her silvery sheen soon restored a little of my former range of vision. The birds of the day had gone to roost by now, and their places had been taken by the birds of the night. The persistent 'chuck-chuck-chuckoo' of nightjars resounded along the nullah, as these early harbingers of the night sought their insect prey along the cooling banks. Time passed again, and then a deathly silence fell upon the scene. Not even the chirrup of a cricket disturbed the stillness, and my friends, the nightjars, had apparently gone else where in their search for food. Glancing downwards at the human remains, it seemed that one arm reached upwards to me in supplication or called perhaps for vengeance. Fortunately, the head was turned away, so that I could not see the frightful contortion of the features, which I had noticed earlier that afternoon.

All at once, the strident belling of an alarmed sambar broke the silence and was persistently followed by a succession of similar calls from a spot I judged to be about half a mile away. These were followed by the sharp cry of spotted-deer, and echoed up the nullah by a restless brain fever bird in his weird call of 'brain-fever, brain-fever', repeated in rising crescendo. I breathed a sigh of relief and braced my nerves and muscles for final action. My friends, the night watchmen of the jungle, had faithfully accomplished their task and I knew the tigress was approaching and had been seen.

The calls then gradually died away. This meant that the tigress had passed out of the range of the callers and was now close by. I strained my eyes on the bend to the right, twenty yards down the nullah, around which, at any moment, I expected the man-eater to appear. But nothing happened. Thirty minutes passed, then forty-five, by the hands

of my wristwatch, clearly visible in the moonlight. Strange, I thought; the tigress should have appeared long ago. She would not take forty-five minutes to cover half a mile.

And then a horrible feeling of imminent danger came over me. Many times before had that obscure sixth sense, which we all possess but few develop, stood me in good stead in my many wanderings in the forests of India and Burma, and on the African veldt. I had not the slightest doubt that somehow, in spite of all my precautions, complete screening and absolute stillness, the tigress had discovered my presence and was at that moment, probably stalking me, preparatory to a final spring.

In moments of danger, we who know the jungle think quickly. It is not braveness that goads the mind to such quick thinking, for I confess that at this moment I was very afraid and could feel beads of cold sweat trickling down my face. I knew the tigress could not be on the nullah itself, or below me, or I would have seen her long before. She might have been on the opposite bank, hidden in the dense under growth and watching my position, but somehow I felt that her presence there would not account for the acutely growing sense of danger that increasingly beset me. She could only be above and behind me. Suddenly it was borne home to me that the four-foot wall of rock behind me prevented me from looking backwards unless I raised myself to a half-crouching, half-kneeling position, which would make a steady shot almost impossible, apart from completely giving away my position to any watcher on the opposite bank, or on the nullah-bed itself. Momentarily, I cursed myself for this lack of forethought, which now threatened to become my undoing. As I hesitated for another second, a thin trickle of sand slid down from above, probably dislodged by the killer, now undoubtedly very close above me, and gathering herself for a final spring. I hesitated no longer; I forced my numbed legs to raise me to a half-crouching position, simultaneously sluing the cocked .405 around, till the end of the muzzle was in line with my face. Then I raised myself a fraction higher, till both my eyes and the muzzle, came above the ledge. A fearful sight revealed itself. There was the tigress, hardly eight feet away and extended on her belly, in the act of creeping down the sloping rock towards me. As our eyes met in surprise, we acted simultaneously, the tigress to spring with a nerve-shattering roar, while I ducked down again, at the same moment contracting my trigger finger.

The heavy blast of the rifle, level with and only a few inches from my ears, mingled with that demoniacal roar to create a sound which often till this day haunts me in my dreams and causes me to awaken,

shivering with fear. The brute had not anticipated the presence of the ledge behind which I sheltered, while the blast and blinding flash of the rifle full in her face evidently disconcerted her, deflecting her aim and deviating her purpose from slaughter to escape. She leapt right over my head, and in passing her hind foot caught the muzzle of the rifle a raking blow, so that it was torn from my grasp and went slithering, butt first, down the sloping rock, to fall dully on the soft sand below, where it lay beside the half-eaten corpse. Quicker than the rifle, the tigress herself reached the nullah-bed, and in two bounds and another coughing roar was lost to view in the thickets of the opposite bank. Shocked and hardly aware of what had happened, I realized I was unarmed and helpless, and that should the tigress return on her tracks, there was just nothing I could do. At the same time, to descend after the rifle would undoubtedly single me out for attack, if the animal were lying wounded in the bushes of the opposite bank. But anything seemed preferable to indecision and helplessness, and I dived down the slope to retrieve the rifle and scramble back, expecting at each second to hear the awful roar of the attacking killer. But nothing happened, and in less time than it takes to tell I was back at the ledge.

A quick examination revealed that no harm had come to the weapon in its fall, the stock having absorbed the shock. Replacing the spent cartridge, I fell to wondering whether I had hit the tigress at all, or if I had missed her at ridiculously close range. Then I noticed something black and white on the ledge behind me and barely two feet away. Picking it up, I found it was the major portion of the tigress' ear, which had been torn off by my bullet at that close range. It was still warm to my touch, and being mostly of skin and hair, hardly bled along its torn edge.

To say that I was disappointed and chagrined could not describe one-tenth of my emotions. I had failed to kill the man-eater at a point-blank range, failed even to wound her in the true sense. The tearing-off of her ear would hardly inconvenience her, beyond causing slight local pain for a few days. On the other hand, my foolish miss would teach her never to return to a kill the second time. This would make her all the more cunning, all the more dangerous and all the more destructive, because now she would have to eat when she killed, and then kill again when she felt hungry, increasing her killings beyond what would have been normally necessary. She might even alter her sphere of activities and remove herself to some other part of the country, where the people would not be aware of the arrival of a man-eater and so fall still easier prey. I cursed myself throughout that night, hoping against hope that the tigress might show up again, but all to no purpose. Morning, and the return of my men, found me chilled to the marrow,

disconsolate and disappointed beyond expression. The hot tea and sandwiches they brought, after my long fast since the previous forenoon, followed by a pipeful of strong tobacco, somewhat restored my spirits and caused me to take a slightly less critical view of the situation which, after all, might have been far worse. Had it not been for my sixth sense, I would undoubtedly have been lying a partially devoured corpse beside that of the previous day's unfortunate victim. I had something to be really thankful for.

Approaching the spot into which the tigress had leapt, we cast about for blood-spoor, but, as I had expected, found none, beyond a very occasional smear from the damaged ear against the leaves of bushes, as the tigress had retreated from what had turned out for her a very surprising situation. Even these we eventually lost some distance away, so that it was an unhappy party of persons that returned to the hamlet, Anchetty, and eventually Gundalam, to report complete failure.

I remained at Gundalam for a further ten days, persistently tying out my buffalo baits each day, although I had little hope of success. Whole mornings and afternoons I devoted to scouring the forest in search of tracks, and nights were spent in sitting over water holes, game-trails and along the bed of the Gundalam River in the hope of the tigress showing up, but all to no avail. Parties of men went out in the daytime in all directions to secure news of further kills, but nothing had happened. Apparently, the tigress had deserted her haunts and gone off to healthier localities.

On the eleventh day, I left Gundalam, tramping to Anchetty and Denkanikota. From there I travelled to Hosur, where I told my friend the Sub-Collector of all that had happened and extracted from him a promise that he would tell me immediately of further kills, should they occur, as I now felt myself responsible for the welfare of the people of the locality. Then, leaving Hosur, I returned to my home at Bangalore.

Five months passed, during which time I received three letters from the Sub-Collector, telling of vague rumors of human tiger-kills from distant places, two being from across the Cauvery River in the Coimbatore District, one from Mysore State territory, and the fourth from a place still further away.

Then suddenly came the bad news I feared, but had hoped would not eventuate, A tiger had struck again at Gundalam, killing her eighth victim there, and the next evening had snatched, from the very door of the little temple at Sulekunta, the old priest who had attended to the place for the last forty years. The letter concluded with the request to

come at once.

Such urgent invitation was unnecessary, for I had been holding myself in readiness for the worst; within two hours I was motoring to Jowlagiri. Arriving there, I was fortunate in being able to talk to one of the party of pilgrims who had almost been eyewitnesses to the death of the old priest of the temple at Sulekunta. Apparently, a party of men had been on pilgrimage and as they approached the temple itself, were horrified to hear the low growl of a tiger, which then leapt into the forest from the roots of a giant pepul tree that grew some thirty yards away. Bolting for shelter into the temple itself, they were surprised to find it tenantless, and looking out were aghast to see the body of the old priest lying within the folds of the gnarled roots of the old pepul tree that directly faced them. After some time, and very timidly, they approached in a group, to find that the old man had apparently been attacked in, or very near, the temple, and then been carried to this spot to be devoured. The tiger had already begun its meal, consuming part of the skinny chest, when it had been disturbed by the pilgrim party.

I particularly inquired as to whether my informant, or his companions, had noticed anything wrong with the tiger's ears, but obviously, they had all been too frightened to observe any defects. I hurried to Sulekunta with my party of three and arrived near dusk; I must confess that the last two miles of the journey had been very uncomfortable, traversing a valley between two steeply sloping hills that were densely clothed with bamboo. But we heard and saw nothing, beyond the sudden trumpeting of a solitary elephant, which had been inhabiting these parts for some time and had been a considerable annoyance to pilgrims, whom he apparently delighted to chase if they were in small parties. But that is another story.

There was no time to make a proper camp, so we decided to sleep in the deserted front portion of the temple itself, a proceeding which I, and very decidedly my followers, would have declined to do under normal circumstances. But nightfall and the proximity of a man-eater are apt to overcome all scruples and principles. I stood guard with the loaded rifle, while my three men frenziedly gathered brush-wood and rotting logs that lay in plenty nearby, to build a fire for our warmth and protection, for on this occasion there was no friendly moon and it would soon be dark. Under such circumstances, attempting to sit-up for the man-eater, in the hope of its passing near the temple, would have been both highly dangerous and futile. Soon we had a bright fire blazing, on the inner side of which we sat, away from the pitch-black jungle night, which could easily have sheltered the murderer, all unknown to us, within a distance of two feet. Listening intently, we

occasionally heard the deep belling boom of sambar, and I could discern the harsher note of a stag, but these did not follow in persistent repetition, showing that the animals had not been unduly alarmed by any such major foe as the king of the Indian jungle. After midnight, we arranged to keep watch in twos, three hours at a time, and I elected, with one of my companions, to take first turn. The other two were soon asleep. Nothing untoward happened, however, beyond the fact that the solitary tusker, who had approached near enough to catch a sudden sight of the fire, trumpeted once again and crashed away.

A kakur, or barking-deer, uttered its sharp cry around 2 a.m., but as this was not continued, I decided it had been disturbed by a wandering leopard. Three o'clock came, I awoke the two sleeping men, and in turn fell into a dream less sleep, to awaken to the early and spirited cry of a grey jungle cock, saluting the rising sun.

Hot tea, made with water from the well nearby, and some food gave us new life and heart, after which I walked across to the giant pepul-tree and inspected the remains of the old priest. The vultures by day, and hyenas and jackals by night, had made a good job of him, for nothing remained but a few cleanly-picked bones, at the sight of which I fell to reminiscing about the old man who had tended this temple for the past 40 years, looking daily upon the same view as the one I now saw, hearing the same night-sounds of sambar, kakur and elephant as I had heard that night, and was now but a few bones, folded in the crevices of the hoary pepul-tree.

For the next hour we cast around in the hope of finding pugmarks and perhaps identifying the slayer, but although we saw a few old trails, I could not with any certainty, classify them as having been made by my tigress. By 9 a.m., we left on the long 23-mile trek to Gundalam, where we arrived just after 5 p.m. Here, upon making inquiries about the recent killing, I gleaned the first definite information about the slayer from a herdsman who had been attending to his cattle at the same watershed where I had tied my buffalo bait on my last visit. This man stated that he had had a companion with whom he had been talking, and who had then walked across to a nearby bush to answer a call of nature. He had just squatted down when, beyond the bush, the devilish head of a tiger arose, with only one ear, soon to be followed by an evil, striped body. The man had shrieked once when the fangs sank into the face and throat, and the next instant tiger and victim had disappeared into the jungle. Here at last was the information I had been dreading, but somehow wanting, to hear. So, after all, it was now confirmed that the killer was none other than my old enemy, the tigress, who had returned at last to the scene of her former depredations, and for whose

return and now vastly increased cunning I was myself responsible.

Everywhere I had heard reports that no cattle or buffaloes had been killed by this beast, so I did not waste time, as on the previous occasion, in setting live baits, realizing that I had an adversary to deal with whom I could only hope to vanquish in a chance encounter, face-to-face. For the next two days, I again searched the surrounding jungle, hoping by luck to meet the killer, but with fear and dread of being attacked from behind at any moment. Pugmarks I came across in plenty, especially on the soft sands of the Gundalam River, where the familiar tracks of the Jowlagiri tigress were plainly in view, adding confirmation to the thought that by my poor shot, some five months ago, I had been responsible for several more deaths.

At midday on the third day, a party of men arrived in a lather, having covered the thirty miles from Jowlagiri to tell me of a further kill this time the watchman of the Jowlagiri Forest Bungalow who had been killed and half eaten within a hundred yards of the bungalow itself, the previous afternoon.

Hoping that the tigress might retrace her steps towards Sulekunta and Gundalam, as she was rumored never to stay in the same place for more than a day after making a human kill, I left with my men at once, augmented by the party from Jowlagiri, who, although they had practically run the thirty miles to Gundalam, preferred the return tramp of twenty-five miles to Sulekunta protected by my rifle rather than return by themselves.

Again, we reached the temple of Sulekunta as daylight was fading and, as the nights were still dark, repeated campfire procedure within the temple itself. Our party had now been increased to twelve, including myself, a number which, although it made us feel safer, was far too many for my personal comfort. This time, however, we were not to spend a peaceful night. The sambar and kakur were restless from nightfall, and at 8.30 p.m. we heard a tiger calling from a spot I judged to be half a mile away. This was repeated an hour later from quite close, and I could then easily distinguish the intonations of a tigress calling for a mate. The tigress had also seen the campfire and become aware of the proximity of humans and, obviously hoping for a meal, she twice circled the temple, her repeated mating calls being interspersed by distinctly audible grunts of anticipation. All this gave me an idea by which I might possibly succeed in keeping her in the vicinity till daylight, at which time only could I hope to accomplish anything. Twice I gave the answering call of a male tiger, and received at once the urgent summons of this imperious female. Indeed, she

came to the edge of the clearing and called so loudly as almost to paralyze us all. I was careful, however, not to call while she was in the immediate vicinity, which might have aroused her suspicions. At the same time, I instructed the men to talk rather loudly, and not over-stoke the already blazing fire, instructions which were doubtlessly most unwelcome. I hoped by these means, between mating urge and appetite, to keep the tigress in the vicinity till daylight. She called again, shortly before dawn and, congratulating myself on my ruse, as soon as it became light enough to see I hastened down the path towards Jowlagiri where, but a quarter a mile away, stood the tamarind tree beneath which the boy had been killed over a year ago, and which I had already mentally noted as an ideal sitting-up place, requiring no preparation.

Reaching the tree in safety, I clambered up some twelve feet to a crotch, which was reasonably comfortable and provided a clear view of the path at both ends. Then, expanding my lungs, I called lustily in imitation of a male tiger. Nothing but silence answered me, and I began to wonder if after all the tigress had moved on at dawn. A new anxiety also gripped me. Perhaps she was near the temple, waiting for one of the men she had marked down the night before to come out of the building. Before departing I had very strictly enjoined my companions not, on any account, to leave the temple, but I felt anxious lest any of them disobey me, perhaps in answer to a call of nature, or to get water from the well that was temptingly near.

I called a second time. Still no answer. After a short interval, and expanding my lungs to bursting-point, I called again. This time I was successful, for my voice penetrated the intervening forest and was picked up by the tigress, who immediately answered from the direction of the temple. I had been right in my surmise; the wily animal had gone there to look for a meal. After a few minutes I called a fourth time and was again answered by the tigress; I was overjoyed to find that she was coming in my direction in search of the mate she thought was waiting.

I called twice more, my last call being answered from barely a hundred yards. Leveling the rifle, I glanced along the sights to a spot on the path about twenty-five yards away. I judged she would take less than thirty seconds to cover the intervening distance. I began to count, and as I reached twenty-seven the tigress strode into full view, inquiringly looking for her mate. From my commanding height in the tree, her missing ear was clearly visible, and I knew that at last, after many tiring efforts, the killer was within my power. This time there would be no slip. To halt her onward movement, I moaned in a low tone. She

stopped abruptly and looked upwards in surprise. The next second the .405 bullet crashed squarely between the eyes, and she sank forward in a lurching movement and lay twitching in the dust. I placed a second shot into the crown of her skull, although there was no need to have done so; actually this second shot did considerable damage to the head and gave much unnecessary extra work to the taxidermist.

The dreaded killer of Jowlagiri had come to a tame and ignominious end, unworthy of her career, and although she had been a murderer, silent, savage and cruel, a pang of conscience troubled me as to my unsporting ruse in encompassing her end. There is not much more to tell. My eleven followers were elated at the sight of the dead marauder. Soon a stout sapling was cut, to which her feet were lashed by strong creeper vines, and we commenced the seven-mile walk to Jowlagiri, staggering beneath the burden. Because of the man-eater's presence, no humans were afoot until we practically entered the village itself. Then word went round and throngs surrounded us. I allowed the people a short hour in which to feast their eyes on their onetime foe, while I retired to a tree some distance away, where hot tea soon refreshed me, followed by some food, and two comforting pipes of tobacco. Then I returned to the village, where willing hands helped me to lash the tigress across the rear seat of my two-seater Studebaker, to begin my homeward journey with the comforting thought that I had lived down my error and avenged the deaths of many humans.

The Man-eater of Jowlagiri

The Spotted Devil of Gummalapur

THE leopard is common to practically all tropical jungles, and, unlike the tiger, indigenous to the forests of India; for whereas it has been established that the tiger is a comparatively recent newcomer from regions in the colder north, records and remains have shown that the leopard or panther, as it is better known in India has lived in the peninsula from the earliest times.

Because of its smaller size, and decidedly lesser strength, together with its innate fear of mankind, the panther is often treated with some derision, sometimes coupled with truly astonishing carelessness, two factors that have resulted in the maulings and occasional deaths of otherwise intrepid but cautious tiger-hunters. Even when attacking a human being the panther rarely kills, but confines itself to a series of quick bites and quicker raking scratches with its small but sharp claws; on the other hand, few persons live to tell that they have been attacked by a tiger.

This general rule has one fearful exception, however, and that is the panther that has turned man-eater. Although examples of such animals are comparatively rare, when they do occur they depict the panther as an engine of destruction quite equal to his far larger cousin, the tiger. Because of his smaller size, he can conceal himself in places impossible to a tiger, his need for water is far less, and in veritable demoniac cunning and daring, coupled with the uncanny sense of self-preservation and stealthy disappearance when danger threatens, he has no equal.

Such an animal was the man-eating leopard of Gummalapur. This leopard had established a record of some human killings and a reputation for veritable cunning that almost exceeded human intelligence. Some fearful stories of diabolical craftiness had been attributed to him, but certain it was that the panther was held in awe throughout an area of some 250 square miles over which it held undisputable sway.

Before sundown the door of each hut in every one of the villages within this area was fastened shut, some being reinforced by piles of boxes or large stones, kept for the purpose. Not until the sun was well up in the heavens next morning, did the timid inhabitants venture to expose them selves. This state of affairs rapidly told on the sanitary condition of the houses, the majority of which were not equipped with latrines of

any sort, the adjacent wasteland being used for the purpose.

Finding that its human meals were increasingly difficult to obtain, the panther became correspondingly bolder, and in two instances burrowed its way in through the thatched walls of the smaller huts, dragging its screaming victim out the same way, while the whole village lay awake, trembling behind closed doors, listening to the shrieks of the victim as he was carried away. In one case the panther, frustrated from burrowing its way in through the walls, which had been boarded up with rough planks, resorted to the novel method of entering through the thatched roof. In this instance it found itself unable to carry its prey back through the hole it had made, so in a paroxysm of fury had killed all four inhabitants of the hut a man, his wife and two children before clawing its way back to the darkness outside and to safety.

Only during the day did the villagers enjoy any respite. Even then, they moved about in large, armed groups, but so far, no instance had occurred of the leopard attacking in daylight, although it had been very frequently seen at dawn within the precincts of a village. Such was the position when I arrived at Gummalapur, in response to an invitation from Jepson, the District Magistrate, to rid his area of this scourge. Preliminary conversation with some of the inhabitants revealed that they appeared dejected beyond hope, and with true eastern fatalism had decided to resign themselves to the fact that this shaitan, from whom they believed deliverance to be impossible, had come to stay, till each one of them had been devoured or had fled the district as the only alternative.

It was soon apparent that I would get little or no cooperation from the villagers, many of whom openly stated that if they dared to assist me the shaitan would come to hear of it and would hasten their end. Indeed, they spoke in whispers as if afraid that loud talking would be over heard by the panther, who would single them out for revenge.

That night, I sat in a chair in the midst of the village, with my back to the -only house that possessed a twelve foot wall, having taken the precaution to cover the roof with a deep layer of thorns and brambles, in case I should be attacked from behind by the leopard leaping down on me. It was a moonless night, but the clear sky promised to provide sufficient illumination from its myriad stars to enable me to see the panther should it approach.

The evening, at six o'clock, found the inhabitants behind locked doors, while I sat alone on my chair, with my rifle across my lap, loaded and

cocked, a flask of hot tea nearby, a blanket, a water bottle, some biscuits, a torch at hand, and of course my pipe, tobacco and matches as my only consolation during the long vigil till daylight returned. With the going down of the sun, a period of acute anxiety began, for the stars were as yet not brilliant enough to light the scene even dimly. Moreover, immediately to west ward of the village lay two abrupt hills, which hastened the dusky uncertainty that might otherwise have been lessened by some reflection from the recently set sun. I gripped my rifle and stared around me, my eyes darting in all directions and from end to end of the deserted village street. At that moment, I would have welcomed the jungle, where by their cries of alarm I could rely on the animals and birds to warn me of the approach of the panther. Here all was deathly silent, and the whole village might have been entirely deserted, for not a sound escaped from the many inhabitants whom I knew lay listening behind closed doors, and listening for the scream that would herald my death and another victim for the panther. Time passed, and one by one the stars became visible, till by 7.15 p.m. they shed a sufficiently diffused glow to enable me to see along the whole village street, although some what indistinctly. My confidence returned, and I began to think of some way to draw the leopard towards me, should he be in the vicinity. I forced myself to cough loudly at intervals and then began to talk to myself, hoping that my voice would be heard by the panther and bring him to me quickly.

I do not know if any of my readers have ever tried talking to themselves loudly for any reason, whether to attract a man-eating leopard or not. I suppose they must be few, for I realize what reputation the man who talks to himself acquires. I am sure I acquired that reputation with the villagers, who from behind their closed doors listened to me that night as I talked to myself. But believe me, it is no easy task to talk loudly to yourself for hours on end, while watching intently for the stealthy approach of a killer. By 9 p.m. I got tired of it, and considered taking a walk around the streets of the village. After some deliberation, I did this, still talking to myself as I moved cautiously up one lane and down the next, frequently glancing back over my shoulder. I soon realized, however, that I was exposing my self to extreme danger, as the panther might pounce on me from any corner, from behind any pile of garbage, or from the rooftops of any of the huts. Ceasing my talking abruptly, I returned to my chair, thankful to get back alive.

Time dragged by very slowly and monotonously, the hours seeming to pass on leaden wheels. Midnight came and I found myself feeling cold, due to a sharp breeze that had set in from the direction of the adjacent forest, which began beyond the two hillocks. I drew the blanket closely

around me, while consuming tobacco far in excess of what was good for me. By 2 a.m. I found I was growing sleepy. Hot tea and some biscuits, followed by icy water from the bottle dashed into my face, and a quick raising and lowering of my body from the chair half-a-dozen times, revived me a little, and I fell to talking to myself again, as a means of keeping awake thereafter.

At 3.30 a.m. came an event, which caused me untold discomfort for the next two hours. With the sharp wind, banks of heavy cloud were carried along, and these soon covered the heavens and obscured the stars, making the darkness intense, and it would have been quite impossible to see the panther a yard away. I had undoubtedly placed myself in an awkward position, and entirely at the mercy of the beast, should it choose to attack me now. I fell to flashing my torch every half-minute from end to end of the street, a proceeding which was very necessary if I hoped to remain alive with the panther anywhere near, although I felt I was ruining my chances of shooting the beast, as the bright torch-beams would probably scare it away. Still, there was the possibility that it might not be frightened by the light, had that I might be able to see it and bring off a lucky shot, a circumstance that did not materialize, as morning found me still shining the torch after a night-long and futile vigil.

I snatched a few hours' sleep and at noon fell to questioning the villagers again. Having found me still alive that morning quite obviously contrary to their expectations and possibly crediting me with the power to communicate with spirits because they had heard me walking around their village talking, they were considerably more communicative and gave me a few more particulars about the beast. Apparently the leopard wandered about its domain a great deal, killing erratically and at places widely distant from one another, and as I had already found out, never in succession at the same village. As no human had been killed at Gummalapur within the past three weeks, it seemed that there was much to be said in favor of staying where I was, rather than moving around in a haphazard fashion, hoping to come up with the panther. Another factor against wandering about was that this beast was rarely visible in the daytime, and there was therefore practically no chance of my meeting it, as might have been the case with a man-eating tiger. It was reported that the animal had been wounded in its right forefoot, since it had the habit of placing the pad side wards, a fact which I was later able to confirm when I actually came across the tracks of the animal.

After lunch, I conceived a fresh plan for that night, which would certainly save me from the great personal discomforts I had

experienced the night before. This was to leave a door of one of the huts ajar, and to rig up inside it a very life-like dummy of a human being; meanwhile, I would remain in a corner of the same hut behind a barricade of boxes. This would provide an opportunity to slay the beast as he became visible in the partially opened doorway, or even as he attacked the dummy, while I myself would be comparatively safe and warm behind my barricade.

I explained the plan to the villagers, who, to my surprise, entered into it with some enthusiasm. A hut was placed at my disposal immediately next to that through the roof of which the leopard had once entered and killed the four inmates. A very life-like dummy was rigged up, made of straw, an old pillow, a jacket, and a sari. This was placed within the doorway of the hut in a sitting position, the door itself being kept half-open. I sat myself behind a low parapet of boxes, placed diagonally across the opposite end of the small hut, the floor of which measured about 12 feet by 10 feet. At this short range, I was confident of accounting for the panther as soon as it made itself visible in the doorway. Furthermore, should it attempt to enter by the roof, or through the thatched walls, I would have ample time to deal with it. To make matters even more realistic, I instructed the inhabitants of both the adjacent huts, especially the women folk, to Endeavour to talk in low tones as far into the night as was possible, in order to attract the killer to that vicinity.

An objection was immediately raised, that the leopard might be led to enter one of their huts, instead of attacking the dummy in the doorway of the hut in which I was sitting. This fear was only overcome by promising to come to their aid should they hear the animal attempting an entry. The signal was to be a normal call for help, with which experience had shown the panther to be perfectly familiar, and of which he took no notice. This plan also assured me that the inhabitants would themselves keep awake and continue their low conversation in snatches, in accordance with my instructions. Everything was in position by 6 p.m., at which time all doors in the village were secured, except that of the hut where I sat. The usual uncertain dusk was followed by bright starlight that threw the open doorway and the crouched figure of the draped dummy into clear relief. Now and again, I could hear the low hum of conversation from the two neighboring huts.

The hours dragged by in dreadful monotony. Suddenly the silence was disturbed by a rustle in the thatched roof, which brought me to full alertness. But it was only a rat, which scampered across and then dropped with a thud to the floor nearby, from where it ran along the

tops of the boxes before me, becoming clearly visible as it passed across the comparatively light patch of the open doorway.

As the early hours of the morning approached, I noticed that the conversation from my neighbors died down and finally ceased, showing that they had fallen asleep, regard less of man-eating panther, or anything else that might threaten them.

I kept awake, occasionally smoking my pipe, or sipping hot tea from the flask, but nothing happened beyond the noises made by the tireless rats, which chased each other about and around the room, and even across me, till day light finally dawned, and I lay back to fall asleep after another tiring vigil.

The following night, for want of a better plan, and feeling that sooner or later the man-eater would appear, I decided to repeat the performance with the dummy, and I met with an adventure, which will remain indelibly impressed on my memory till my dying day. I was in position again by six o'clock, and the first part of the night was but a repetition of the night before. The usual noise of scurrying rats, broken now and again by the low-voiced speakers in the neighboring huts, were the only sounds to mar the stillness of the night. Shortly after 1 a.m., a sharp wind sprang up, and I could hear the breeze rustling through the thatched roof. This rapidly increased in strength, till it was blowing quite a gale. The rectangular patch of light from the partly open doorway practically disappeared as the sky became overcast with storm clouds, and soon the steady rhythmic patter of rain-drops, which increased to a regular downpour, made me feel that the leopard, who like all his family are not over-fond of water, would not venture out on this stormy night, and that I would draw a blank once more. By now, the murmuring voices from the neighboring huts had ceased or become inaudible, drowned in the swish of the rain. I strained my eyes to see the scarcely perceptible doorway, while the crouched figure of the dummy could not be seen at all, and while I looked I evidently fell asleep, tired out by my vigil of the two previous nights.

How long I slept I cannot tell, but it must have been for some considerable time. I awoke abruptly with a start, and a feeling that not all was well. The ordinary person in awaking takes some time to collect his faculties, but my jungle training and long years spent in dangerous places enabled me to remember where I was and in what circumstances, as soon as I awoke. The rain had ceased and the sky had cleared a little, for the oblong patch of open doorway was more visible now, with the crouched figure of the dummy seated at its base. Then, as I watched, a strange thing happened. The dummy seemed to

move, and as I looked more intently, it suddenly disappeared to the accompaniment of a snarling growl. I realized that the panther had come, seen the crouched figure of the dummy in the doorway which it had mistaken for a human being, and then proceeded to stalk it, creeping in at the opening on its belly, and so low to the ground that its form had not been outlined in the 'faint light as I had hoped. The growl I had heard was at the panther's realization that the thing it had attacked was not human after all.

Switching on my torch and springing to my feet, I hurdled the barricade of boxes and sprang to the open door way, to dash outside and almost trip over the dummy, which lay across my path. I shone the beam of torchlight in both directions, but nothing could be seen. Hoping that the panther might still be lurking nearby and shining my torch-beam into every comer, I walked slowly down the village street, cautiously negotiated the bend at its end and walked back up the next street, in fear and trembling of a sudden attack. But although the light lit up every corner, every rooftop and every likely hiding-place in the street, there was no sign of my enemy anywhere. Then only did I realize the true significance of the reputation this animal had acquired of possessing diabolical cunning. Just as my own sixth sense had wakened me from sleep at a time of danger, a similar sixth sense had warned the leopard that here was no ordinary human being, but one that was bent upon its destruction. Perhaps it was the bright beam of torchlight that had unnerved it at the last moment; but, whatever the cause, the man-eater had silently, completely and effectively disappeared, for although I searched for it through all the streets of Gummalapur that night, it had vanished as mysteriously as it had come.

Disappointment, and annoyance with myself at having fallen asleep, was overcome with a grim determination to get even with this beast at any cost. Next morning the tracks of the leopard were clearly visible at the spot it had entered the village and crossed a muddy drain, where for the first time I saw the pug-marks of the slayer and the peculiar indentation of its right forefoot, the paw of which was not visible as a pug-mark, but remained a blur, due to this animal's habit of placing it on edge. Thus, it was clear to me that the panther had at some time received an injury to its foot, which had turned it into a man-eater. Later I was able to view the injured foot for myself, and I was probably wrong in my deductions as to the cause of its man-eating propensities; for I came to learn that the animal had acquired the habit of eating the corpses which the people of that area, after a cholera epidemic within the last year, had by custom carried into the forest and left to the vultures. These easily procured meals had given the panther a taste

for human flesh, and the injury to its foot, which made normal hunting and swift movement difficult, had been the concluding factor in turning it into that worst of all menaces to an Indian village a man-eating panther.

I also realized that, granting the panther was equipped with an almost-human power of deduction, it would not appear in Gummalapur again for a long time after the fright I had given it the night before in following it with my torchlight. It was therefore obvious that I would have to change my scene of operations, and so, after considerable thought, I decided to move on to the village of Devarabetta, diagonally across an intervening range of forest hills, and some eighteen miles away, where the panther had already secured five victims, though it had not been visited for a month.

Therefore, I set out before n a.m. that very day, after an early lunch. The going was difficult, as the path led across two hills. Along the valley that lay between them ran a small jungle stream, and beside it I noted the fresh pugs of a big male tiger that had followed the watercourse for some 200 yards before crossing to the other side. It had evidently passed early that morning, as was apparent from the minute trickles of moisture that had seeped into the pugmarks through the river sand, but had not had time to evaporate in the morning sun. Holding steadfastly to the job in hand, however, I did not follow the tiger and arrived at Devarabetta just after 5 p.m.

The inhabitants were preparing to shut themselves into their huts when I appeared, and scarcely had the time nor inclination to talk to me. However, I gathered that they agreed that a visit from the man-eater was likely any day, for a full month had elapsed since his last visit and he had never been known to stay away for so long.

Time being short, I hastily looked around for the hut with the highest wall, before which I seated myself as on my first night at Gummalapur, having hastily arranged some dried thorny bushes across its roof as protection against attack from my rear and above. These thorns had been brought from the hedge of a field bordering the village itself, and I had had to escort the men who carried them with my rifle, so afraid they were of the man-eater's early appearance.

Devarabetta was a far smaller village than Gummalapur, and situated much closer to the forest, a fact which I welcomed for the reason that I would be able to obtain in formation as to the movements of carnivora by the warning notes that the beasts and birds of the jungle would utter, provided I was within hearing.

The night fell with surprising rapidity, though this time a thin sickle of new moon was showing in the sky. The occasional call of a roosting jungle-cock, and the plaintive call of peafowl, answering one another from the nearby forest, told me that all was still well. And then it was night, the faint starlight rendering the tortuously winding and filthy lane that formed the main street of Devarabetta hardly visible, and as if in a dream. At 8.30 p.m., a sambar hind belled from the forest, following her original sharp note with a series of warning cries in steady succession. Undoubtedly, a beast of prey was afoot and had been seen by the watchful deer, who was telling the other jungle-folk to look out for their lives. Was it the panther or one of the larger carnivora? Time alone would tell, but at least I had been warned.

The hind ceased her belling, and some fifteen minutes later, from the direction in which she had first sounded her alarm, I heard the low moan of a tiger, to be repeated twice in succession, before all became silent again. It was not a mating call that I had heard, but the call of the King of the Jungle in his normal search for food, reminding the in habitants of the forest that their master was on the move in search of prey, and that one of them must die that night to appease his voracious appetite.

Time passed, and then down the lane I caught sight of some - movement. Raising my cocked rifle, I covered the object, which slowly approached me, walking in the middle of the street. Was this the panther after all, and would it walk thus openly, and in the middle of the lane, without any attempt at concealment? It was now about thirty yards away and still it came on boldly, without any attempt to take cover or to creep along the edges of objects in the usual manner of a leopard when stalking its prey. Moreover, it seemed a frail and slender animal, as I could see it fairly clearly now. Twenty yards and I pressed the button of my torch, which this night I had clamped to my rifle. As the powerful beam threw across the intervening space, it lighted a village cur, commonly known to us in India as a 'pariah dog'. Starving and lonely, it had sought out human company; it stared blankly into the bright beam of light, feebly wagging a skinny tail in unmistakable signs of friendliness.

Welcoming a companion, if only a lonely cur, I switched off the light and called it to my side by a series of flicks of thumb and finger. It approached cringingly, still wagging its ridiculous tail. I fed it with some biscuits and a sandwich, and in the dull light of the star-lit sky its eyes looked back at me in dumb gratitude for the little food I had given it, perhaps the first to enter its stomach for the past two days. Then it curled up at my feet and fell asleep.

Time passed and midnight came. A great horned owl hooted dismally from the edge of the forest, its prolonged mysterious cry of 'Whooo-whooo' seeming to sound a death-knell, or a precursor to that haunting part of the night when the souls of those not at rest return to the scenes of their earthly activities, to live over and over again the deeds that bind them to the earth.

One o'clock, two and then three o'clock passed in dragging monotony, while I strained my tired and aching eyes and ears for movement or sound. Fortunately, it had remained a cloudless night and visibility was comparatively good by the radiance of the myriad stars that spangled the heavens in glorious array, a sight that cannot be seen in any of our dusty towns or cities. And then, abruptly, the alarmed cry of a plover, or 'Did you- do-it' bird, as it is known in India, sounded from the nearby muddy tank on the immediate outskirts of the village. 'Did-you-do-it, Did-you-do-it, Did-you-do-it, Did-you- do-it', it called in rapid regularity. No doubt the bird was excited and had been disturbed, or it had seen some thing. The cur at my feet stirred, raised its head, and then sank down again, as if without a care in the world.

The minutes passed, and then suddenly the dog became fully awake. Its ears that had been drooping in dejection were standing on end; it trembled violently against my legs, while a low prolonged growl came from its throat.

I noticed that it was looking down the lane that led into the village from the vicinity of the tank. I stared intently in that direction. For a long time I could see nothing, and then it seemed that a shadow moved at a corner of a building some distance away and on the same side of the lane. I focused my eyes on this spot, and after a few seconds again noticed a furtive movement, but this time a little closer.

Placing my left thumb on the switch, which would actuate the torch, I waited in breathless silence. A few minutes passed, five or ten at the most, and then I saw an elongated body spring swiftly and noiselessly on to the roof of a hut some twenty yards away. As it happened, all the huts adjoined each other at this spot, and I guessed the panther had decided to walk along the roofs of these adjoining huts and spring upon me from the rear, rather than continue stalking me in full view.

I got to my feet quickly and placed my back against the wall. In this position, the eave of the roof above my head passed over me and on to the road where I had been sitting, for about eighteen inches. The rifle I kept ready, finger on trigger, with my left thumb on the torch switch, pressed to my side and pointing upwards.

A few seconds later, I heard a faint rustling as the leopard endeavored to negotiate the thorns, which I had taken the precaution of placing on the roof. He evidently failed in this, for there was silence again. Now I had no means of knowing where he was. The next fifteen minutes passed in terrible anxiety, with me glancing in all directions in the attempt to locate the leopard before he sprang, while thanking Providence that the night remained clear. And then the cur, that had been restless and whining at my feet, shot out into the middle of the street, faced the corner of the hut against which I was sheltering and began to bark lustily.

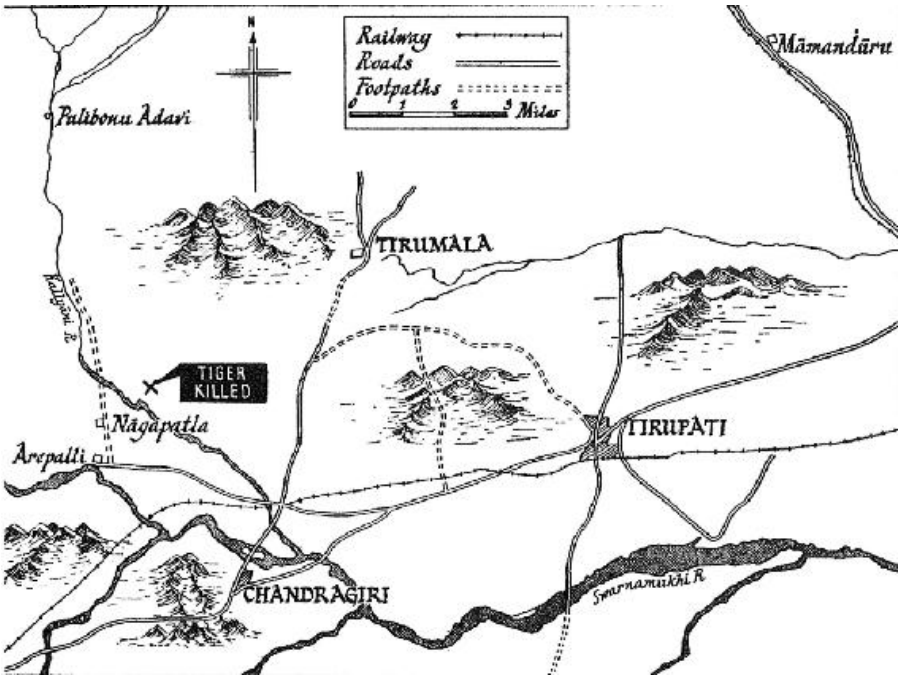
This warning saved my life, for within five seconds the panther charged around the corner and sprang at me. I had just time to press the torch switch and fire from my hip, full into the blazing eyes that showed above the wide opened, snarling mouth. The .405 bullet struck squarely, but the impetus of the charge carried the animal on to me. I jumped nimbly to one side, and as the panther crashed against the wall of the hut, emptied two more rounds from the magazine into the evil, spotted body. It collapsed and was still, except for the spasmodic jerking of the still-opened jaws and long, extended tail. And then my friend the cur, staunch in faithfulness to his newfound master, rushed in and fixed his feeble teeth in the throat of the dead monster.

And so passed the 'Spotted Devil of Gummalapur', a panther of whose malignant craftiness I had never heard the like before and hope never to have to meet again. When skinning the animal next morning, I found that the injury to the right paw had not been caused, as I had surmised, by a previous bullet wound, but by two porcupine quills that had penetrated between the toes within an inch of each other and then broken off short. This must have happened quite a while before, as a gristly formation between the bones inside the foot had covered the quills. No doubt, it had hurt the animal to place his paw on the ground in the normal way, and he had acquired the habit of walking on its edge.

I took the cur home, washed and fed it, and named it 'Nipper'. Nipper has been with me any years since then, and never have I had reason to regret giving him the few biscuits and sandwich that won his staunch little heart, and caused him to repay that small debt within a couple of hours, by saving my life.

The author with Nipper

The Striped Terror of Chamala Valley



THE Chamala Valley is part of the northeastern tip of the District of Chittoor in the Presidency of Madras, where it adjoins the District of Cuddapah immediately to the north. It is a comparatively small valley, its main portion extending northwards for some seven miles by five wide, with two branches at its extremity, like the letter 'Y', running respectively north-west and north-east, somewhat narrower than the main valley and each about four miles long. The branches terminate below the bluff crags of a towering escarpment that forms the southern boundary of Cuddapah.

A beautiful stream, called the Kalayani River, flows down the northeastern valley, having its twin sources just below the escarpment, in magnificently wooded forest glens named Gundalpenta and Umbalmeru, where pools of translucent, ice-cold water are always to be found even in the hottest part of summer. The Kalyani then flows southward through the main valley and eventually enters a cultivated area at the hamlet of Nagapatla, with an ancient lake at which the kings of Chandragiri, and afterwards the all-conquering Mohammedan hero, Tippoo Sultan, attempted to construct a dam to feed water to the

parched countryside in the terribly hot months of summer. A heavily thatched, but snug forest bungalow has been constructed by the Forest Department on the southern side of the lake, bordering the ancient aqueduct. The sleepy village of Arepalli Rangampet lies about a mile and a half distant, and is of almost recent origin. The Chamala Valley is entirely forested and in the days of British rule was a game preserve. Westward lies the Bakhrapet Forest Block and eastward the Tirupati Forest Range, which culminates in the great pilgrim shrines of Tirupati, famous throughout India. Southward is the ancient town of Chandragiri, with its age-old fort, a mute tribute to the glory of its former Kings.

A metre-gauge railway line passes close to Chandragiri, on its way to Tirupati and Renigunta, where it joins the arterial broad-gauge line from Madras to Bombay. A arrow cart-road leads from Chandragiri railway station for about three and a half miles to Rangampet; then it turns north wards for a mile and a half to Nagapatla, whence it continues still further north and becomes a Forest Depart mental path for all the seven miles of the Chamala valley till it reaches a spot named Pulibonu, which means Tiger's Cage', where it abruptly ends. Two flat, square, cemented campsites, and a well to provide a continuous supply of drinking water, have been constructed at this spot by the Forest Department. The valley and its branches are beautiful, and when I first visited them, eighteen years ago, were a paradise for game. Large herds of chital, or spotted deer, roamed the main valley, some of the stags carrying heads the like of which I have nowhere seen in Southern India. The slopes of the foothills running into the Bakhrapet range on the west, and the Tirupati range on the east, as well as along the foot of the whole northern escarpment, were the home of magnificently proportioned and antlered sambar. The black or sloth bear could be found everywhere, but was especially numerous and dangerous in the dense forest be low the escarpment. Kakar, or the 'muntjac' or barking deer, as it is known, also abounded. The main valley and its northeastern appendage were the regular beat of tiger, which came from the Bakhrapet range, passed up the valleys, crossed the escarpment and into the Cuddapah Forests, thence to the Mamandur range and onwards to Settigunta. Panther were everywhere, and the area abounded in peafowl, spur fowl and grey jungle fowl, the latter especially being very numerous. This was the only forest in Southern India where I have found jungle fowl crowing even at midday, and regularly at 2 a.m., and at about 4.30 a.m., apart, of course, from their usual chorus at sunrise and sunset.

Into this peaceful area, one day, early in 1937, came the striped terror of which I shall tell you. He was a tiger of normal size, and his tracks

indicated no deformity that might have accounted for his partiality for human flesh. He suddenly appeared, no one knew from where, nor had any rumor been heard of the activities of a man-eating tiger in any of the adjoining forest areas, far or near. Strange as was his sudden and unheralded coming, it was soon well known that a man-eater had entered the valley, for he killed, and wholly ate, a bamboo-cutter near the pools of Gundalpenta. Within three days thereafter, he practically entirely devoured a traveler on the Nagapatla- Pulibonu forest track, close to the fourth milestone. Thereafter his killings became sporadic and irregular, extending throughout the length and breadth of the three valleys, where in all he killed and devoured, or partly devoured, seven people in the space of about six months.

One day the Forest Range Officer from Bakhrapet, in whose area the Chamala Valley is included, was on his way to take up residence in the Forest Bungalow at Nagapatla, during his rounds of inspection. He travelled by bullock cart, in which he was also bringing provisions, personal effects and other necessities for the period of a fortnight he would stay at Nagapatla.

It was 5 p.m., and the cart was hardly two miles from its destination, when a tiger walked on to the road in front of the vehicle. I should have told you that this road, leading from Bakhrapet to Nagapatla, ran through the reserved forest for practically its whole length, the last two miles being across the beginning of the Chamala Valley itself. Seeing the tiger on the road before him, the cart-driver brought his vehicle to a stop and called out to the Range Officer and the Forest Guard who were with him. As the cart was a covered one and they were inside, neither had seen that there was a tiger on the road.

The three men commenced to shout, when the tiger, walking along the clearing that bordered the road, passed the cart and so came into view of the two men inside. At this juncture, the Forest Guard, for no understandable reason, jumped out of the cart and commenced waving his hands and shouting, to frighten the beast away. However, he sealed his own fate, for with a succession of short roars the animal charged, seized him in its jaws, and bounded back into the concealing forest. The action had been so unexpected and abrupt that the Range Officer had no opportunity to do a thing, although what he could have done in any event was problematical, as he himself was unarmed.

The cart was then driven to Nagapatla in great haste, but it was not until the following morning that a large group could be assembled, armed with matchlocks, hatchets and staves, to attempt to find the unfortunate Forest Guard, or rather what was left of him. The remains

were eventually located in a ravine, less than a furlong from the road; only the head, hands and feet, and his bloodstained and mangled khaki uniform and green turban, were left to tell the tale, the latter lying where it had fallen when the tiger jumped with its victim across the clearing that bordered the road.

This tragedy received a great deal of official attention, and was published by the Press throughout the country. A reward was offered by the Government for the destruction of the man-eater, and several venturesome hunters, both local and from the city of Madras, arrived at the valley to destroy the creature. But after its last killing, and as if it had become aware that it had attracted too much attention, the terror completely disappeared for a while, nor could any trace of it be found anywhere in the valley. The assumption was that it had escaped, either by traversing the escarpment northwards into the Cuddapah District, or had wandered into the Bakhrapet or Tirupati blocks. The whole locality was on the alert, but nothing was heard of the animal for the next two months.

Then one day a railway ganger, patrolling the broad gauge railway track near the station of Mamandur, which stands on the Madras-Bombay arterial line, and is situated in a wide, densely-forested plateau, encircled with hills, some eighteen miles north-east of the Chamala Valley, failed to report at the terminal point of his patrol. No particular notice of his absence was taken for a day or two, as sudden absenteeism on trivial grounds is a common occurrence in the East; but when after that the man still failed to put in an appearance, the matter was regarded more seriously, and a squad was sent out to try to find him. Walking along the railway, the first clue to the missing man's fate was the large hammer he had been using, which was found lying beside the track. Gangers are issued with such hammers to keep in place the wooden blocks used to wedge the rails against their supports, known as chairs. On the hard, sun-baked earth, no signs of any struggle were evident, but not far away were a few drops of blood that led down an embankment and into the neighboring forest. Following this trail, the party came across an odd chapli (or country-made slipper) as worn by the missing ganger, together with traces of blood that had been smeared against the leaves of bushes. A little further, they crossed a strip of dry, soft sand, traversing which they clearly found the pugmarks of a tiger.

This established that the missing man had been taken by a tiger. The fame of the man-eater of the Chamala Valley had spread far and wide during the past months, and naturally, it was concluded that this animal was responsible for the latest tragedy. Incidentally, the remains of the

ganger were never found. Thereafter, two kills occurred during the succeeding months. The first at Settigunta, n miles north-west of Mamandur, and the second at Umbalmeru, which, as you will remember, was one of the twin sources of the Kalyani river before it entered the Chamala Valley, At this time, I was on a business visit to Madras and had had occasion to visit the Chief Conservator of Forests with regard to a complaint I had earlier lodged against the activities of local poachers in the Salem District. While talking to the Chief Conservator, he mentioned the activities of the tiger of which I had read a great deal in the Press and suggested I make an attempt to bag the animal.

Fortunately, I had not availed myself of privilege leave during the past year, and as I had some months to my credit, I decided to spend one of them in making such an effort. Returning to Bangalore, I spent the next few days in getting together all the many necessities for such an undertaking and ten days later, I was at the Nagapatla Forest Bungalow, which I had decided to make my headquarters in conducting the campaign against the man-eater of Chamala.

The first thing to do was to make exhaustive local inquiries, visit the spots in the Chamala Valley where The kills had occurred, and try to establish some sequence in the localities where the various incidents had taken place, so as to arrive, if possible, at a knowledge of the beat the tiger followed. This I entirely failed to do; it became obvious that this particular animal was a wanderer, who visited the valley there for some time, snatched a human victim wherever opportunity offered, and climbed over the escarpment in the direction of Mamandur or into the Cuddapah District.

Not without considerable difficulty, I purchased four young buffaloes. These I tied up at widely separated points; one at Gundalpenta, another at Umbalmeru, a third at a water-hole called Narasimha Cheruvu, close to the fourth milestone of the Nagapatla-Pulibonu forest road, and the last at a rocky stream named Ragimankonar, a tributary of the Kalyani River, as it issued from the rocky hills of the Tirupati block about two miles east of the road. On the second day the bait at Narasimha Cheruvu was killed, but examination showed this to be the work of a large Tendu', or forest panther, and not of a tiger, as I had hoped. As baits are costly and I could not afford to lose them to interfering panthers, I sat up for this animal by the waterhole, and was lucky enough to bag him by 6.45 p.m., while it was still daylight, when he returned to the kill.

I then bought another bait, to replace the one the panther had killed,

and secured it to the same spot at Narasimha Cheruvu. The next week was spent in idleness at the forest bungalow, except for long walks throughout the forest every morning and evening in all directions in the hope of accidentally meeting the tiger. On the morning of the ninth day, when driving early in my Studebaker in the direction of Pulibonu, from where I intended starting out on another stroll through the jungles, I came across the pugmarks of a tiger which had joined the road at the sixth milestone and had walked down the middle of it to beyond Pulibonu. No distinguishing peculiarities about the man-eater's tracks had been so far observed, so that it was impossible to tell whether the animal that had made these fresh tracks was the slayer I was seeking, or just a casual wandering tiger. These pugs were, in places, very clear in the soft roadside sand, and I was able to examine them minutely; but be yond enabling me to say that they had been made by a male tiger of average size, no other peculiarity or distinguishing mark of any sort presented itself. Leaving the car at Pulibonu, I walked up the northeastern valley, the forest track crossing and re-crossing the Kalyani River, where I saw that the tiger had preceded me for some distance. I visited both Gundalpenta and Umbalmeru that day, in high hope that one or other of my baits had been taken, but found both of them alive, placidly chewing at the large piles of hay I had left them so that they might be as comfortable and as contented as possible. After lunch that afternoon I returned and attempted to follow the tiger's tracks from the place I had last observed them. But I only partly succeeded, losing the tracks in some heavy bamboo that clothed both banks of the river along its higher reaches. It was fairly late that evening when I turned back towards Pulibonu. Proceeding a half-mile, and still within the heavy bamboo belt, I came upon a sloth bear which had made an unusually early appearance, as these creatures do not begin their wanderings till after sun down. He was standing up against a large white-ant hill, with his nose and a part of his head inside the hole he had made, drawing the white ants into his ready mouth with powerful inhalations. He looked for all the world like a very black, hairy man, standing against the anthill, while the noises he was making in his efforts were extraordinary, resembling the buzzing of a million bees, interspersed with loud, impatient snuffling and shuffling, as of a giant bloodhound on the trail.

I drew quite close to the bear, yet he did not see me, so engrossed he was in his congenial task. I could have come still closer, but this would have meant that, when eventually he did become aware of my presence, he would probably attack, and I would have to shoot him. This I did not want to do, as personally, I have no quarrel with bears, and secondly, the sound of my shot would disturb the jungle and might

result in driving the tiger away. So I stopped at the distance of about forty yards and coughed loudly. The bear heard me, ceased his buzzing and snuffling, and whirled around on his hind feet, to face me with an expression that was amusing, to say the least of it. Annoyance, fear, chagrin and resentment were writ large across his mud-covered features. For a moment, he watched me, rising still higher on his hind-legs, and I thought at first, he would make a blind charge, which is the habit of the sloth bear when disturbed at close quarters. But better judgment prevailed; he sank to all fours and bolted for all he was worth, bounding away like a black hairy ball, muttering, 'Aufl Aufl Aufl'

Early next morning found me back at Pulibonu. There were no pugmarks on the road to indicate the tiger's return, leaving the inference that he was somewhere in the northeastern valley, or that he had departed across the escarpment. Leaving the car, I trudged to Gundalpenta, but found my bait alive, still chewing hay as if nothing else in the world mattered. Then I went on to Umbalmeru, and upon approaching the spot where my other bait had been tethered, found that it was missing. Examination revealed that it had been killed by a tiger, which had then succeeded in dragging it away, after first snapping the strong tethering rope with which I had secured it. To follow the drag mark was easy, and after proceeding about 100 yards, my attention was attracted by a solitary crow, perched on the low branch of a tree, looking downwards in expectation.

This could only mean one thing that the tiger was there and in possession of his kill. If he were not there, the crow would have descended to feed on the carcass, instead of sitting on a branch looking so dejectedly downwards, as he was doing at that moment. The tree on which the crow was sitting overlooked a downwardly sloping bank of spear grass, at the foot of which was a small depression densely covered by a thicket. It was somewhere in this thicket that the tiger, and his kill, were sheltering. To approach this thicket directly was inadvisable. To begin with, the tiger would probably hear me and decamp. On the other hand, and especially if he were the man-eater, he would undoubtedly charge, and the proximity of the surrounding bushes and the length of the spear grass gave me a very poor chance of being able to stop him before he reached me.

I therefore backed away some fifty yards and began casting about for a detour by which I could approach the spot from some other angle, or perhaps from the opposite side, where I could glimpse the tiger from more favorable ground.

To my good fortune, a shallow nala ran diagonally across, roughly from

north-west to northeast, on its way to join the early reaches of the Kalyani River. Tiptoeing up this nala, I soon judged I was abreast of the thicket in which the tiger lay. Continuing for another twenty-five yards, I cautiously climbed the right-hand bank and found, as I expected, that I was now some little distance beyond the thicket. A half-grown tamarind tree lay a few yards ahead of me, and creeping up to this, I swung myself into its sheltering branches, and then climbed higher in the hope of being able to look down into the thicket. But I was disappointed, in that I could see nothing. Not even the crow was visible from this position, as the low branch on which he was perched was obscured from my view by the intervening thicket. I had, therefore, no means of knowing whether the tiger was still there, or had moved on.

I remained in this position for about half an hour, hoping that the jungle or rather its inmates would indicate the movements of the tiger if he came out of the bushes. The sun was well up by now, and I knew the tiger would soon move off to one of the water-pools of Umbalmeru, to quench his thirst after the heavy meal he had undoubtedly had.

Then I heard the peculiar alarm cry of a grey langur monkey, 'Ha-aahl Harl Harl' he called, from a hundred yards to my left. This he repeated steadily, to the accompanying, ‘Cheek! Cheek! ‘Of the female of the tribe.

The tiger had moved at last, and the langur watchman had seen him. There is no need for me to tell those of my readers who are familiar with the Indian forests about the wise ways of langur monkeys. Those who are not will be interested to know that these great grey arboreans, with black faces and enormously long tails, live in tribes in the forests, where they exist entirely on wild fruits, certain leaves, and of course the multifarious caterpillars and insects which form a particular delicacy. The flesh of the langur is an out standing attraction on the menu of tigers and panthers, and of some jungle tribes, so that generations of hard experience have taught them to post a watchman, who invariably takes up his position on the highest tree and keeps an intent lookout for prowling felines. It might do some humans good to take a leaf out of the langur watchman’s book, for while he is on duty this langur will not feed or allow his attention to be in any way distracted from his job. He realizes that the safely and lives of the babies, females and other members of his tribe depend entirely on his vigilance. You will see him on top of the highest tree, sitting alert and looking around. Not a movement within visible range escapes his beady, black eyes. Eventually and only after he is relieved by another watchman, will he think of feeding himself?

The normal calls of langurs at play are a series of resounding 'Whoomp Whoomps', that echo down the hillsides and the deep forest glens. When he spots danger, however, the watchman barks, 'Ha-aahl Har I Harl' in a successive series of calls, and the tribe seeks safety in the highest trees. Alas, for all the wisdom of the astute langurs, tiger and panther have also developed an instinctive technique to overcome the cleverness of these monkeys, for they too must eat. When they hear the watchman's call, tigers and panthers who have been stalking the tribe know they have been discovered, and that the monkeys will take to the highest trees. So they now change their tactics, and after having located a tree on which a number of the apes are seated, rush with a series of blood-curdling roars towards it and possibly leap to the lowest fork, as if to climb the tree themselves. Seated on the highest branches, the langurs would be quite safe if they would only stay put. But the horrid snarls and roars, together with the terrible striped or spotted form charging towards them with wide-open jaws, unnerves the poor beasts, and they jump wildly from their perches of safety, either in attempts to reach neighboring trees, or from the great height on to the ground itself, where one of them invariably falls an easy prey to the tiger or panther anticipating the foolish act. But I have digressed, and must return to what happened alter I heard the langur watchman's 'Ha-aah ! Har ! Har !'

Clambering down the tree, I crept forward with my rifle at the ready diagonally towards the spot from which the langur watchman was giving his warning. Knowing the tiger to have fed well, I did not anticipate it would attempt to molest the monkeys on this occasion, but that when seen by the watchman he was making his way towards one of the pools. Spear grass and 'wait-a-bit' thorn grew prolifically in this area and progress was both slow and difficult. Proceeding very cautiously about half a furlong, I caught sight of the langur watchman on the top-most branch of a wild-cotton tree, at the same instant as he saw me. He now had two possible enemies to observe, and I knew if I watched carefully enough I would be able to get a rough idea of the tiger's whereabouts by noting in which direction the langur was looking. I accordingly squatted down on my haunches in the long grass and 'froze'. The watchman looked in my direction for a few seconds, then looked away to his left, then back again at me, then back again left, still voicing his alarm.

I knew by these glances that he was watching both the tiger and me and judged the latter to be ahead of me by at least a hundred yards. Getting to my feet, and bent double, I shuffled forward as rapidly as possible in the direction I judged the tiger to be, much to the consternation of the already excited langur watchman, who could not

make out whether I contemplated an attack against the tribe or against the tiger. His alarm call re-doubled both in tempo and volume, a fact which began to worry me as I knew the tiger was listening to him too, and would sense, by this increased excitement, some fresh source of danger to the monkeys and so also, perhaps, to himself.

And I was right. I covered the hundred yards rapidly, and after another twenty-five yards, I judged that I must now be pretty near the tiger and that it was time to redouble my caution. Momentarily, I glanced back at the langur watchman. He was looking intently in my direction, confirming the fact that both the tiger and myself were now in the same area of his vision. 'Freezing' again, I listened and watched minutely the space before me, and on either side. It consisted of the usual clumps of thorn-bush, interspersed by short glades of spear grass, about four feet high. As I watched, I saw a slight movement of the grass to my left, about thirty yards away. I raised myself in order to get a better view, and the tiger saw me. A low growl followed by two bounds, and he had disappeared. I knew it was now both futile and dangerous to follow him, having made him aware of my presence and the fact that he was being followed. Cautiously guarding my rear against a surprise attack, I crept back towards the thicket in which I knew the kill was lying, and I soon found it. The calf had been half-eaten; it was resting on its left side, sheltered by the grass and thicket from vultures, and very fortunately overlooked by a wild mango tree. I had now to make a quick decision. There was a chance of the tiger returning to his kill, in spite of having seen me, which I would miss if I were to lose this opportunity of sitting up for him. At the same time, I had not come equipped for a night vigil, and was carrying no torch, blanket or food. If I decided to sit up, I would have to remain in the tree till morning, as the nights were dark at that time and there was no moon. It would hardly be possible to negotiate the pitch-black forest and return to my car at Pulibonu, apart from the fact that I would be entirely at the man-eater's mercy. If I remained, I was in for a night of extreme discomfort in the bitterly cold breeze that would blow down from the escarpment, against which I could not shield myself. I thought of going back to the car to get the necessary things. The distance was roughly four miles each way, and I feared the tiger might come back in my absence and entirely remove the kill.

Finally, I decided to abandon all thought of personal discomfort and sit it out. Ascending the mango tree, I settled myself in its second fork, where I was able to be fairly comfortable with my back against a branch. I folded my feet crosswise, in Indian fashion, after removing my shoes, and stood the cocked rifle against the branch before me. From this position I had a clear view of the kill to my left, then an

interruption by the branch before me, then another view, then a branch, then a view over my right shoulder at an angle from which it was impossible to shoot, and finally the branch against which my back rested. This precluded any view of the rear. At the same time, I was about fifteen feet from the ground and safe from the tiger's spring. To reach me he would have to pass the first crotch in the tree, where he would be almost at point-blank range. The time was 12.50 p.m., and I settled down to what I felt would become one of the coldest and most unendurable vigils of my whole career as a hunter, I will not weary my readers by recounting how the hours dragged by until 6.30 p.m., when the fowl and day birds of the forest had gone to roost, and the langurs had long since moved away from the hated presence of their two enemies, tiger and man. I was alone, except for an occasional nightjar that flitted, chirping, around my tree. At 6.45 p.m., it was almost dark. The nightjar had now settled below me, and commenced its squatting call of 'Chuckoo-chuckoo-chuckoo', when I met one of the strange experiences that sometimes, but very rarely, fall to the lot of a wanderer in the Indian forests.

I had been told stories by jungle men, and had also read, that tigers, in particular localities only, imitate sambar and emit the belling call of a stag, presumably to decoy other animals of the same species to them, particularly the does. I had never placed much credence in this story, and never experienced it myself. That evening, shortly after 6.45, the sudden solitary 'Dhank' of a sambar stag rang out from a thicket in the waning light, in the space still visible between the branch against which my rifle rested before me, and that immediately to the right, and from out of this thicket almost simultaneously stepped the tiger.

Now there could not have been any sambar stag in that thicket, along with or just in front of the tiger, for I could not have missed its hoof beats as it ran from the spot. No Sambar would have stood there and allowed the tiger practically to touch it in passing. Beyond that one 'Dhank' there was no other sound, when, as I have said, the tiger stepped into the open, and there was no possible doubt that the tiger had made the sound. Why it did so is a mystery, as it was not hunting. It had fed well earlier that morning and was now returning to another repast, so that there could have been no thought in its mind of decoying a sambar by imitating its call. I can only recount what actually happened, and what I experienced, and the fact that, beyond doubt, there was no sambar in that thicket when the tiger stepped out. I leave the rest to your own conjecture and conclusion. For my part, having heard it with my own ears, I have no alternative but to believe the old tales I had read and heard of a tiger's ability to mimic

this sound.

The animal walked towards the kill and was lost to view behind the branch before me, which opportunity I seized to get my rifle into position. It then reappeared to my left, and very shortly seized the kill in its jaws and lifted it. My shot struck it squarely behind the left shoulder. It spun around to receive my next shot in the neck, then collapsed, kicked and twitched for another minute, and was still.

The tiger being dead, I now felt that it was safe for me to walk to the car, provided I could find my way in the darkness. With all the difficulties involved, I felt this to be preferable to sitting all night in the tree, cramped and shivering, with the cold and on an empty stomach. Abruptly making up my mind, I shinned down the tree without approaching the tiger, and hurried off to find the bed of the Kalyani River before total darkness set in, for I realized it would be possible, even in darkness, to stumble along the bed of the dry river which would ultimately bring me to Pulibonu and the car, although the distance would be about six miles through all the bends of the river. I would almost surely lose the narrow footpath, the only alternative, in the darkness, and have to spend the night in the jungle.

Trying to negotiate the stony bed of the Kalyani in darkness proved a real nightmare. On many occasions, I slipped on the rounded boulders that strewed the bed of the stream in profusion, or barked my shins against hidden tree stumps and rocks. More than once I was in danger of twisting an ankle, or perhaps breaking a leg in jumping from one boulder to another, and twice I fell while holding my precious rifle aloft to prevent dashing it against the rocks. The journey required absolute concentration, and it took me four hours to reach Pulibonu, stepping into the car at ten minutes past 11 pm.

You may suppose that in driving back to Nagapatla I was congratulating myself on having slain the man-eater. But in actual fact, I was not, for many circumstances forced themselves on my mind and made me uneasy as to the degree of success I had achieved. First, the tiger had killed buffalo bait; second, it had remained at that bait when discovered by me and then casually retreated, with me following; third, after becoming aware of my presence it had turned tail and fled; fourth, it had returned to its buffalo-kill; last, it had emitted a close imitation of a sambar's call. All these facts individually and collectively far from indicated the actions or behavior of a man-eater, but pointed instead to an ordinary tiger, more particularly a game-killer. The more I thought about it, the more doubtful I became that I had shot the man-eater. It was good for my peace of mind that, when concentrating on my

struggle along the Kalyani River in the darkness, I had not had time to think of these things, or of how I had placed myself entirely in the power of the real man-eater, had he met me in those circumstances.

Next morning I returned with a party of men, carried the tiger to the car and brought it to Nagapatla, where general joy prevailed at the death of the man-eater. Before skinning the beast, I examined it very carefully and found it to be a flawless specimen of adult male tiger, with a beautiful coat and in perfect physical condition. This made me doubt even more that I had bagged the real man-eater.

That evening I left for Bangalore, spending the night with the Collector at Chittoor, to whom I recounted my misgivings, and extracted a promise that he would let me know by telegram should any human kills recur. On the afternoon of the eleventh day from that date, I received his wire, stating that a woman cutting grass, just within the boundary of the Reserve Forest forming the Chamala Valley, and within a mile of Nagapatla, had been carried away by the man-eater. I had failed. I had shot the wrong tiger, exactly as I feared, had been the case.

Next morning found me journeying back to Nagapatla, arriving at the little forest bungalow late that afternoon. Early the following morning, I was shown the spot where the tiger had attacked his most recent victim. The woman had been cutting grass, which she had gathered into a bundle preparatory to carting it away on her head. This bundle she had placed beneath the shade of a tree and was evidently in the act of tying it up, when the tiger, which had stalked her from the adjacent jungle, launched his attack. Another woman, who had also been cutting grass and was about a hundred yards away at the time, had heard a piercing scream, and, looking up, had been in time to see a tiger disappearing into the forest with her companion in its jaws. She had fled to Nagapatla and told the tale, whence news had been conveyed to Rangampet and onwards to Chandragiri, where the Tahsildar had taken immediate steps to inform the Collector at Chittoor, who in turn had telegraphed me. No attempt had been made to follow the tiger, or to rescue the woman. Three days had now elapsed since the occurrence, and the ground was too dry to reveal any tracks. Casting around in a broad semi-circle, we succeeded in finding the woman's saree, which had unraveled itself from her naked body and lay on the ground some quarter mile away. Blood tracks we could not find, showing that the tiger had not released its original grasp of her throat, for there had been no other cries from the unfortunate victim after her first desperate scream for help. We never succeeded in locating the remains of that woman.

Returning to the village, I procured the three remaining buffalo calves, which had been my baits on the last visit and had been left behind; I tied one close to the roadside by the fourth milestone, one at Pulibonu, and this time I tied the third only two miles from Nagapatla, in the bed of the Kalyani River before it entered cultivated areas.

The following morning all three baits were alive, but there were also tiger pugs along the Pulibonu forest road. The tiger had joined the track just before the third mile, passed my bait on the fourth mile without touching it, and had left the road again at the sixth mile, shortly before reaching Pulibonu, making eastwards towards a large, stony hill, known as 'Monkey-hill', that jutted out from the Tirupati block.

The pugmarks were distinct and revealed no deformity in the animal. Nevertheless, it had passed within a few feet of my live-bait, which I had tied by the roadside on the fourth mile, without even stopping to look at it, as the tracks very clearly indicated. This was certainly much more like the behavior of a man-eater, and I felt a sense of elation that at last I seemed to be up against the real thing.

As I have said, the tiger had gone towards 'Monkey Hill'. It was either sheltering on its jungle-clad slopes, or had perhaps skirted the base of the hill and rejoined the track towards Gundalpenta and Umbalmeru, and thence onward to the escarpment, further away. In any case, there was a faint chance that it might return along the road that night, and as now there was a good moon, nearing full, I determined to make an attempt to shoot the animal on this path. A large teak tree stood by the roadside some 150 yards from my bait at the fourth milestone. Like most of its kind, this tree had an upright stem practically impossible to climb, but by seating myself at its base with my back to the bole, I commanded a view of my bait, the road in both directions, and over a hundred yards on all sides, since that section of the forest had suffered from fire about a year before and was therefore free of undergrowth.

I took up my position by 5 p.m. As darkness set in the moon, which had just topped the trees to the east, restored visibility by casting its pale, silvery light over the silent forest. Although in daylight I considered that the position I had selected was quite safe, nightfall had its accustomed effects, and I began thinking of the possibilities of the tiger stalking me from the rear. Commonsense came to my rescue however, and told me this was impossible, unless the tiger first saw me, or heard me for tigers have practically no sense of smell. But to be seen or heard I would have to move first, so you may be certain I sat absolutely still and without a sound, with my back resting against that big tree. I could not smoke nor eat, but had taken the precaution of

dressing warmly against the chill that would set in with the early hours of the next day. I remember that the jungle was exceptionally silent that night, leading me to conclude the tiger was not in the vicinity. As I had anticipated, the early hours brought with them a sharp drop in temperature, and as a consequence an equally sharp dewfall, till my clothes were soaking wet and the ice-cold barrel of the rifle streamed with moisture.

Several times, I glanced towards my buffalo-calf, to see how it was reacting. The first part of the night, it spent in placidly chewing the cut grass I had provided, but in the early hours, it settled down on the ground apparently to rest and get what warmth it could against the chill that had set in.

Dawn eventually came to the relief of a very dispirited hunter, and I made my way back the four miles to Nagapatla. Here a wash, followed by steaming tea, bacon and eggs, and two hours' snatched sleep, made me feel a new man again and fit for any eventuality. I motored up the road to Pulibonu, two trackers seated on each mudguard while I drove at a snail's pace, the men scanning the road as we went. But the tiger had not passed anywhere along it that night. Arriving at Pulibonu, we skirted the vicinity of the Kalyani River in both directions, as well as a mile up each of the tracks leading north-west and northeast, but again we found no evidence of the tiger's recent passing.

About noon, we returned to Pulibonu, where I sat down by the forest well to smoke and consider my plan of action for that night. Just across the Kalyani, and two furlongs from where I was sitting, grew a tamarind tree, which overlooked the bifurcations in the forest paths, leading respectively to Pulibonu, and branching off northeastwards to Umbalmeru and the escarpment. I had heard that several tigers had been shot from this tree in recent years; indeed, I had myself bagged a small leopard as it passed below me while I sat in that tree some eighteen months earlier, so that I eventually decided to commit myself to the safety of its sheltering branches for the next few nights, at least while the moon was on, in preference to the danger always present while sitting on the ground.

Having come to a decision, I instructed my two men to make a machan on the same branches I had occupied previously, and while they did so, I fell fast asleep at the foot of the tree. The men knew what they were doing, and some thirty minutes later awoke me to examine their handiwork and put the few necessary final touches. I always carry the frame of a charpoy, or Indian rope cot, constructed in two half-sections, in the rear seat of the Studebaker. Experience has taught me

that this makes the best machan. It is light but strong, makes no noise even if you move about on it, is very comfortable, and most important of all, and lends itself to easy erection on any tree as a machan, easy concealment by a screen of leaves, and easy removal when the time comes to go home. Moreover, it is both cheap and portable.

This charpoy had been strung across two branches, to which it had been securely bound with cotton rope, which I also carry for such purposes. The whole had been well concealed by twigs, which had also been built up along the sides to provide further concealment for myself. An opening had been provided through which I could see the crack where it branched immediately below me, and also some 100 yards in each direction, towards both Pulibonu and Umbalmeru. A similar opening in the screen of leaves behind me allowed me to see the road back to Nagapatla for quite 200 yards.

All being to my satisfaction, I drove the men back to Nagapatla, had a hearty lunch and a further short nap till 4 p.m., when I got together the necessary blanket, water bottle, gun-torch, sandwiches and tea, and returned alone to Pulibonu, where I concealed the Studebaker in a forest glade adjoining the well. Walking back to the tree, I was settled for the night before 6 p.m. The hours dragged by practically undisturbed by jungle sounds till 11 o'clock, when a panther made its sawing call from the direction of the Umbalmeru track. 'Ah-hahl Ah-hah!' it sawed, the sound being an almost exact imitation of somebody sawing wood, the expiration and inspiration of breath at each double sound faithfully resembling the forward and backward motions of a saw in action. Then around the bend he strode, a beautiful specimen of 'Thendu', or large forest panther, the rosettes on his hide showing up clearly in the brilliant moonlight. He walked towards the tree in which I was sitting, crossed the road below it and disappeared into the forest on the other side. Filled with admiration, I watched the pretty sight, but let the animal go, for fear of disturbing the tiger which might hear my shot if he was anywhere in the vicinity.

Nothing further turned up that night, and the following night was exceptionally uninteresting, in that I did not hear or see a thing. Returning to Nagapatla next morning, I fell asleep, but was wakened about 10 a.m. with the news that a herdsman had been killed by the tiger scarcely half-an-hour before. Hastily dressing and grabbing my rifle, I followed the bereaved brother of the missing man and a few others for about three-quarters of a mile down the Pulibonu road, where we branched to the right and were soon on the banks of the Kalyani River. The man had been grazing his buffaloes in this vicinity, when the tiger had sprung upon him from the thicket of rushes, which

here bordered the river. The man had screamed, and his brother, who was attending the same herd and driving on the stragglers, had seen the whole incident. In this case, the tiger had grasped his victim by the shoulder, so that it was possible for him to continue to scream as he was dragged away into the same bank of rushes from which the tiger had sprung. His brother had then run back to the village to spread the news, and on to the forest Bungalow where I was sleeping. Reaching the actual spot from which the man had been taken, we followed into the rushes, where the slightly bent reeds indicated the direction from which the tiger had approached, while a much more evident path showed how he had left, carrying his victim in his mouth. The victim's turban lay among the reeds, after traversing which we reached the dry bed of the river. The man had possibly been struggling, or his screams may have annoyed the tiger, for he had here released his hold of the man's shoulder and probably grasped his throat. From this place a fresh blood trail became evident, as well as a drag-mark, where the man's legs had trailed along the ground as the tiger hastened with its victim across the exposed sands that formed the bed of the river, into the jungle that clothed the further bank.

Cautiously advancing, we traversed the dense shrubbery that immediately bordered the river on its further bank and came out on to a grassy glade. The tiger with its burden, in crossing the glade, had bent the heads of spear grass and they had not yet had time to recover. Following along land that sloped slightly upwards, I crested a long hillock, beyond which the ground dropped sharply into a small stream as it wended its way to join the Kalyani further down. I felt that the tiger would decide to begin his gruesome meal in the hidden recesses of that stream, and at the moment was in all probability engaged on this task.

To follow the trail directly into the stream would be useless, as, no matter how cautiously I might move, I was bound to make some slight sound among the thorns that would put the tiger on the alert and acquaint him with the fact that he was being pursued. A man-eater in such circumstances is an extremely dangerous animal to deal with, and I knew that he had all the advantages of cover and concealment in his favor. He might decide to abandon his human victim and bolt, or even carry it with him; he might decide to remain by his kill and fight it out; most dangerous of all, he might decide to ambush me in the thick undergrowth, by launching a rear or flank attack. Very quickly reviewing the situation, I therefore decided to cut across to my right in a diagonal fashion, enter the stream about a quarter of a mile down its course, and then work upwards along the soft sand which at least would emit no sound if I covered it on tip-toe. By this means, I hoped to

surprise the tiger on its kill.

Retreating accordingly across the small hillock I had just crested, I bent double on its further side, where I knew I would be lost to view from the nala-bed, and in this position, I shuffled forward as rapidly as possible for a furlong or so. Then again cresting the ridge, I noted the direction of the stream by the undergrowth along its banks, and descended in a half-right declination to meet it a furlong further down. Eventually reaching the sandy bed, I halted for a minute to regain my breath, after moving in the doubled position I had been doing, and then, with rifle cocked and held to my shoulder, I began to tip-toe up the soft sand, keeping as much as possible to the centre of the stream-bed and avoiding the thickets and bushes that clothed its banks. I will always remember that nightmare walk. The stream narrowed in places to ten yards; at its widest point it was never more than thirty. I tiptoed forward slowly, every sense alert, scanning every bush and shrub on both banks, looking below them and around them, and as far as I could see. Periodically, I stopped to listen intently, but no sound disturbed the abysmal silence, like that of the land of the dead. How I longed for the slightest living sound, the chirp of an insect, or the call of a bird ! Nothing but total silence enveloped me, broken only by the very faint, grating sounds of my own footsteps as I cautiously tiptoed forward along the sand.

I might have progressed about half a furlong in this way when the stream took a slight turn to the left. Before reaching this point, I halted in my tracks to listen, and it is well that I did so, for next instant, soundlessly and unheralded, appeared the tiger, carrying its human victim by the back, just 25 yards away.

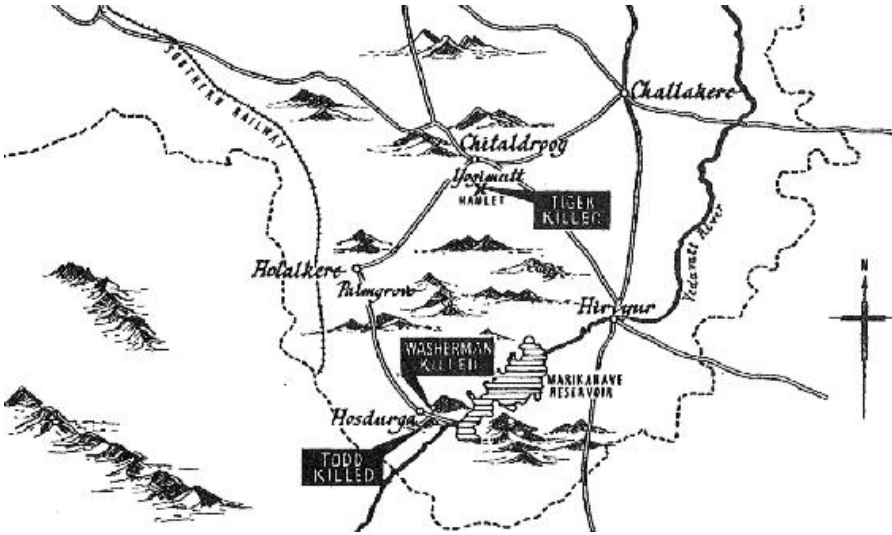
The surprise was mutual. Evidently, the tiger had heard or sensed he was being followed, and without getting down properly to his meal had decided to convey it to some remoter spot downstream. On my part, although I had moved so cautiously at every step, I had not actually anticipated meeting the tiger just yet. Inaction for both of us was only momentary, however. Dropping its prey, the tiger sank its head between its fore legs, its hind-legs gathering beneath it, with tail erect, tensed for the spring. At the same time the rifle spoke, the bullet striking the animal, as I later discovered, just a half inch below the centre of a straight line between the eyes. But this slight inaccuracy was sufficient to have missed the vital brain-shot that would have dropped it instantly in its tracks, and with a gurgling roar, it rushed forward, lurching over its victim and stumbling onward in its stunned efforts to reach me. Leaping to one side, I fired round after round into the striped form, till I stood with empty magazine before the twitching

monster at my feet, from whose smashed and mangled skull the blood literally spurted in a heavy red stream.

Next instant I felt faint and sick from reaction, I reached the bank, where for a moment I almost passed out. But a strong constitution came to my rescue and I was able to return to the men whom I had left on the main stream of the Kalyani; they had heard my five shots, which told them that now indeed the man-eater was dead.

You may be interested to know that, although we examined that tiger closely, both before and after skinning, and actually held a post-mortem on the carcass, absolutely no trace could we find of any physical or functional disorder or derangement that might have caused it to become a man-eater. Here indeed was a finely proportioned adult animal, able, from all the evidence that could be gathered by external examination, to hunt its natural food, the game of the forest, or even an adopted diet in the form of cattle from the village. But it had deliberately repudiated both these forms of food to follow a perverse taste for human flesh, which had eventually resulted in encompassing its end, and incidentally, very nearly mine. Where it had originally come from nobody knew, but all were glad that it had now gone to the jungles from which there was no return.

The Hosdurga-Holalkere Man-Eater



HOLALKERE is the second-largest town in the District of Chitaldroog, which itself is the northernmost district of the native State of Mysore and borders on the neighboring division of Bellary in the Province of Madras towards the north-east, and on the Province of Bombay to the north west. It has long been the centre of sporadic instances of man-eating by tigers, and there is good evidence to believe that the locality is the habitat of tigers, which have inherited a taste for human flesh.

About ten years ago, several instances of human kills were reported in this area, which was thrown open, by advertisement in the Mysore Gazette, to the free shooting of tigers without the requirement of a big-game license. At that time, there was a very sporting couple in Bangalore, Angus Mactavish and his wife, who were keen on killing a tiger, particularly a man-eater, and suggested to me that we make a party of three and spend some four weeks in the attempt.

Accordingly, we motored in Mactavish's car from Bangalore to Chitaldroog, the capital town of the district of the same name, where we called on the District Forest Officer to obtain all possible information about the most recent kills and where they had taken place. This Officer was most co-operative and informed us that the existing man-eater's beat extended from the very out skirts of Chitaldroog town itself to the town of Holalkere, which lay some ten

miles away in a south-westerly direction, and thence southward nine miles to the small village of Hosdurga, where the two recent human victims had been taken.

From Hosdurga the line of the tiger's activities was re ported to proceed eastwards to the borders of the huge reservoir of Marikanave or Vani vilas, as it is sometimes known, five miles away, an enormous lake inhabited by huge fish and crocodile; all along the shores of this lake, and back northwards in a rough line to Chitaldroog town itself. Indeed, he assured us, the man-eater had been reported among the ruins of an old fort, which crested a small hill named Yogi Mutt, rising abruptly to the south of the town. I knew that the environs of this old fort had long been frequented by stray bears and panthers, with an occasional tiger, but after further consultation it was decided to move on to Holalkere and Hosdurga, where we would establish our centre of operations, as circumstances warranted, after hearing local reports.

Leaving early next morning, we reached Holalkere with in an hour, where the usual condition of nervous excitement and fear that accompanies the proximity of a man-eater always prevails. We were told all sorts of stories, some of them completely contradictory, and from this mass of statements were able to gather only that the man-eater was a very astute animal, wandered everywhere and had the knack of appearing unexpectedly at most unlikely places. A prevailing rumor was that it very often frequented a vast plantation of date palms, interspersed with a dense undergrowth of lantana that bordered both sides of the road leading from Holalkere to Hosdurga. This plantation commenced just beyond the outskirts of Holalkere itself. We were told that its pugmarks could be seen almost daily on the road, and were advised to motor up and down the nine miles that connected the two places all night, when we would surely meet the man-eater, sooner or later, particularly when passing the palm-grove. Accordingly, we set out at 7 p.m. that night, and had left Holalkere a mile behind when the tall, spreading leaves of the palm-trees came into view, the close array of their spiky trunks being entirely hidden from view at the base by a dense and continuous stretch of lantana undergrowth.

From this point, we motored onwards at a snail's pace, flashing the spotlight in all directions, while the gleaming headlights pierced the road before us. Proceeding in this fashion for a half-mile, we came upon what looked like a very black, hairy man who had climbed a palm-tree some 15 feet high to the right of us, and was busy gulping down bunches of the small, yellow half-ripe palm dates that hung in clusters from among the spiky fronds.

We approached closer and stopped the car, when this strange man began to climb down. Descending halfway, however, he stopped and looked around at us, and my companions were surprised to discover that their 'strange man' was a sloth bear, disturbed at a feast of dates. I had known from the onset that it was a bear, but had wanted my companions to learn for themselves. With her .3005 Springfield rifle, Mrs. Mactavish brought off a good shot from the car, dropping the creature to the ground with a resounding thud.

We then motored on to Hosdurga without seeing a thing, returned to Holalkere, and twice more backwards and for wards in each direction, seeing nothing beyond a hyena near the carcass of the bear on our final return journey. Fearing, therefore, that if we left the carcass there any longer it would be destroyed, by herculean effort the three of us managed to hoist the heavy body on to the space between the engine and the front mudguard of Mac's car. Although long, the hair of a bear is slippery, and it was most difficult to keep a firm hold of any part of the animal, which began to slip out of one's fingers as soon as its weight was lifted.

Next morning we had tea at t he Travelers' Bungalow at Holalkere, together with steaming porridge, bacon, and eggs, which Mrs. Mactavish prepared in excellent fashion. Then after skinning the bear, we decided to move on to Hosdurga to obtain first-hand information about the two latest human kills.

Traversing the date-palm plantation in day-light enabled us to realize fully the denseness of the surrounding, all enveloping lantana, which it was impossible to fathom the night before, and of what little hope there was to see or shoot a tiger in such a place. At Hosdurga, we were told the story of the two earlier tragedies. The first had happened some three weeks before. A girl aged eleven years, and incidentally a distant relation of the Amildar of the Taluq, was living with her parents in a house on the outskirts of the village. At 8 p.m. she had gone outside, probably to answer a call of nature, and had never been seen again, nor had any cry or sound, explaining her fate, been heard. Anxious about her failure to return, her parents followed with a lantern, but nothing was seen of her, nor were any marks evident on the hard ground. Becoming increasingly alarmed, they aroused the village, and in about two hours a party of some fifty persons, armed with lanterns, staves, hatchets and two-muzzle loading guns, went forth to search for the girl. Nothing could they find, however, in the darkness that night. Next day further efforts were made, and a few fragments of tattered underwear were found entangled among thorns a half-mile away. Nothing was ever found of the remains of that little girl.

The second kill had occurred twelve days ago, in the following fashion. The reservoir of Marikanave lay some five miles away to the east. About halfway to its shore, and crossing the track that led there, was a tiny brook that formed, close to the trackside, a small but fairly deep pool. This pool was used by two brothers of the village, who were professional 'dhobis' or washer men, as a convenient place in which to wash clothes. They possessed three donkeys, which were used for conveying the washing to and from the pool. That evening they had finished their task at about 5 p.m., loaded the donkeys and were returning homewards. These animals, being their only stock-intrade, so to say, were taken particular care of, one brother walking in advance followed by the three donkeys in line, and the other brother bringing up the rear. They were a mile from Hosdurga when a tiger leapt from concealment, seized the leading man and disappeared with him before he could utter a sound. His brother in the rear, seeing what had happened, lost his head and bolted back towards the pool, which they had just left.

When 8 p.m. came and neither the donkeys nor the brothers had turned up at Hosdurga, the two wives became alarmed and spread agitation throughout the village. By 10 p.m. a second search party of some three-score men, armed with lanterns, staves and, of course, the two muzzle loading guns, set forth in search.

In due course, they came upon one of the three missing donkeys, complacently sitting in the middle of the track, the bundle of washing still tied to its back. Farther on, a furlong short of the pool, they came upon the man who had turned tail and fled. He had fainted with terror at finding himself alone in the jungle after seeing what had happened to his brother, and was in a state of collapse. He frothed at the mouth and his eyes were turned upwards. It was nearly an hour before he was in a condition to whisper hoarsely the terrifying news. Together with him, the party then returned to the spot where the attack had taken place, when a half-hearted attempt was made to search for the missing man. Naturally, it proved unsuccessful and it was decided to return next day. Accordingly daylight found the party back again, when extensive search revealed bits of tattered clothing, a blood trail, and finally the remains of the unfortunate man, which had been three-quarters eaten during the night. All that was left was his head, two arms, one whole leg and just the remaining foot, which were duly gathered together and brought back to Hosdurga for cremation. Contentedly grazing a furlong from the track were the two remaining pack-donkeys.

An additional piece of news was now offered, in that four days ago a

bullock cart, with a double-yoke of oxen, proceeding to Holalkere, had been attacked by a tiger three miles from Hosdurga at about 3 p.m. In this instance, the driver had jumped out of the cart and escaped, returning by a circuitous route through the forest to the village. A party had gone out next morning to find the cart, with one bull still yoked to it, standing by the roadside. Hardly 50 yards away lay what was left of the other bull, which the tiger had killed, wrenched free of the yoke, carried this distance and then eaten in full view of its unfortunate companion.

Along with all this news, we were also told that a rival party of two huntsmen was in occupation of the small one-room Travelers' Bungalow of which the village of Hosdurga boasted, having arrived by car some five days earlier. This indeed cramped our style, as it would not be cricket to commence attempts at shooting the man-eater when the other sportsmen had preceded us. Further, in keeping with the good old adage of 'too many cooks spoil the broth', too many huntsmen generally achieve nothing beyond frightening off their quarry, that is, if they do not in the meantime accidentally shoot each other.

It was nearing ten o'clock by the time we had gathered all this information, and we were just debating the advisability of returning to Holalkere, when the two sportsmen in question turned up. They were both youngsters, and although inexperienced, were exceedingly keen on the game. Introducing themselves, they repeated all the news we had already heard, and added that they had tied out buffalo bait for the last two nights in the vicinity of where the washer man had been eaten. Nothing had happened during the first night and their party of coolies had gone out that morning to ascertain how the bait had fared the previous night.

We wished these gentlemen the best of luck, and told them we would return to Holalkere so as not to be in their way. They would not hear of the idea, however, considered our action to be a personal affront and begged us to join them in the bungalow till the next morning, when, they stated, they were due to return to Bellary, where they had come from. In the midst of all this friendly talk, their party of coolies arrived to announce that the bait had been killed and half eaten the night before. Those two boys were the acme of hospitality and offered us the chance of sitting over their bait. Of course, we would not consent to this.

After a combined lunch, we set out with them to see the kill and render any possible assistance. We found the boys had chosen rather

unwisely in tying their bait in a region scattered with boulders. Moreover, they had not secured the animal properly, with the result that the tiger had broken the tethering rope and dragged its victim partly behind a rock, and completely out of view of the tree in which they had intended to construct their machan. To the spot where the kill had been dragged were two possible lines of approach by the man-eater, if in fact it was a man-eater that had killed the bait; the first being from the direction of the track where the 'dhobi' had been killed, and the other from a hillock lying a quarter-mile away, approximately south-east of the kill. Two separate boulders, among the many that lay around, were so positioned as to command each a view of these possible lines of approach, as well as of the kill and of each other.

The two sportsmen therefore elected to sit, one behind each of these boulders. I ventured to suggest that, as the adversary they were dealing with might also turn out to be the man-eater, it would be safer if they sat on top of the boulders behind a concealing wall of thorns. They did not agree to this, however, and decided to sit on the ground with their backs to the boulders.

Roughly sheltering them behind a few cut thorny bushes, we left these doughty lads by 4 p.m. to return to the bungalow. I was anxious about their welfare and would have liked to linger within calling-distance, to render help if necessary, but finally decided that my presence might frighten the tiger off, and my motive be misunderstood.

Little did we know that afternoon, that our hearty good wishes for a lucky night were the last words that any of our party would utter to one of those fine boys. We spent the evening in the bungalow, drinking tea, smoking and chatting, while interviewing as many villagers as possible to gain additional information. A strong wind was blowing from the south-west, so that it would be impossible to hear any rifle shot fired by the two lads, who were over a mile away. We had an early dinner, and Mactavish and his wife then turned in. I decided, however, to sit on the verandah and listen to any jungle sounds I might possibly hear.

It was nearing 11 o'clock, the village had been silent for the past hour and I was thinking of going to bed, when I heard a peculiar noise, which I soon recognized as running, stumbling footsteps in the distance. Realizing that my intuitive fear of impending trouble, experienced so strongly earlier that evening, had not misled me, I hastily grabbed my rifle and torch and ran out to meet the runner. It turned out to be Ince, the elder of the two sportsmen. His clothes were tattered, he was lathered in sweat and staggered like a drunken man, looking behind him continually as he stumbled forward. Supporting him

by the shoulder, I asked what had become of his companion. The poor boy was so exhausted that he could hardly speak, but he finally gasped out the awful words, ‘’Tiger got him carried him off, ooh ! ooh ! " and began to weep on my shoulder like a child.

I hurried him to the bungalow, where I awoke Mactavish and his wife. We gave Ince a stiff dose of brandy, laid him down and covered him with two blankets, for he was now shaking like an aspen with the reaction that had set in. Then, with Mrs. Mactavish chafing his hands, we impatiently waited for his story, and it was indeed an extra ordinary tale. He had sat below the rock commanding the approach from the track, while his companion, Todd, behind the other rock, commanded the approach from the hillock. Shortly before dark, Ince thought he had seen a long, red dish object move in the bushes quite some distance away and beyond Todd, where the land sloped gently down from the hillock. Of course, he had no means of apprising Todd of what he had seen, and knew that the latter did not know about it, as that area was hidden from his view by the very boulder below which he Todd was sitting. Ince had continued to watch the bushes, but had seen nothing there after.

Then darkness fell, and the hours passed wearily by until about 10 p.m. The kill was not visible in the shadows, although the stars shed a faint light that enabled Ince to see in his immediate vicinity. Suddenly Ince heard a faint thud, a slight dragging noise, and then the unmistakable sound of crunching bones. Guessing that the tiger had returned and was eating its kill, Ince waited awhile to give his companion a chance to take the shot, knowing, as he did, that the kill was equidistant, if not a little nearer to Todd, who must also be hearing the sound of the tiger feeding.

Nothing happened, however, and nobody will know why Todd remained inactive. Then the thought came to Ince that perhaps his companion had fallen asleep, and with that, he decided to take the shot himself. Aligning his rifle in the direction of the kill, he pressed the button of his rifle-torch, the bright beam immediately revealing a huge tiger devouring the remains of the buffalo.

At the same time, there was a piercing scream from Todd, a horrible growl from that direction, a slight scuffling noise, another half-muffled cry, and then silence. In the meantime, Ince had shifted the beam of his rifle-torch from the tiger and his kill to the rock, at the base of which Todd had been sitting earlier that evening. The last glimpse he had of the former was as it bounded away from the remains of the buffalo into the concealing shrubs.

Of Todd he could see no sign. Calling to his friend repeatedly, Ince rushed blindly to the spot where he had been sitting. Todd's rifle, water bottle and half-empty packet of sandwiches lay on the ground, but he was nowhere to be seen. Becoming hysterical with the realization that his friend had been taken by the man-eater, Ince floundered about and attempted to search the jungle for him, only to lose his own way. Demented with grief and growing more desperate each minute, he rushed aimlessly about when, by sheer good luck, he succeeded in stumbling on the track leading to Hosdurga, up which he had run top speed. It was now clear from Ince's story that we had two tigers to deal with: one an avowed cattle-lifter and the other an even more determined man-eater. They were probably a pair, male and female, although this was not necessarily so. Never in my life had I met such an unusual combination. The possibility that they were two grown cubs from the same litter, one of which had acquired man-eating tendencies, appeared to be ruled out by Ince's description of the cattle-lifter as a 'huge tiger' and by no means half-grown. The man-eater nobody had seen. Within fifteen minutes we aroused the village, and assembled some twenty rather reluctant helpers, although the owners of the two muzzle-loaders were again to the fore, with lanterns, sticks, staves and hatchets. Mrs. Mactavish insisted on coming too, and so did Ince, although he was almost spent. The search party, together with Mactavish and myself, were soon at the rock from which Todd had been taken.

Casting around, it was not long before we found an odd rubber-soled shoe that had fallen from his left foot. From the place where we found it we judged the tiger was making with its burden towards the little hillock from which it had apparently come. Pressing forward with all possible speed, we eventually reached a spot where the animal had first laid its victim down. From then, probably alarmed by the noise created by Ince in his shouting and floundering, it had moved on. As usual, a blood trail now commenced, which led us to the base of the hillock, which it followed towards the right-hand side. Led by Mactavish and myself, and keeping close together for fear of unexpected attack, we persevered in our search, but it was 3.30 that morning before we came upon what remained of poor Fred Todd. The tiger had eaten quite half of him, and it was a ghastly sight. A severe reaction now overtook Ince, who began to retch, wept and finally collapsed. It was past 6 a.m. that terrible day before we managed to get the remains to Hosdurga, together with a now totally incapable Ince.

We put what was left of Fred Todd into Mactavish's car, while I drove Ince in what had been his poor friend's motor, and we reached Chitaldroog by 9 o'clock. Here Ince was taken into the Local Fund

Hospital, and we spent the major part of the day on the tedious official inquiries that follow an incident of this kind, so that it was almost sun set before we returned to Hosdurga, and a very empty, silent Travelers' Bungalow. We fell asleep that night, sad and disheartened, but grimly determined on revenge. Mrs. Mactavish, in particular, had endured the nervous strain of the past twenty hours in heroic fashion, and was of untold assistance throughout the whole time. Early next morning found us back at the scene of the tragedy, where we spent the next three or four hours in piecing together the evidence. The ground was hard, as no rain had fallen for several weeks, and it was impossible to find an imprint of the man-eater to enable us to determine its size and sex. Ince's description of the cattle-killer led us to think it was a male. The man-eater was therefore, in all probability, a female, although, as I have said earlier, this was not necessarily so. Finding nothing in the vicinity, we followed the trail once more to the spot where we had found Todd's body, but nowhere could we see a solitary pugmark of the killer. We even attempted to look further, but the hard ground hid its secret well, and in spite of all our efforts, the man-eater's size and sex remained a secret.

During our absence at Chitaldroog, the vultures had completely demolished what had remained of the buffalo kill. We now had to make a fresh start in our operations. After due consultation it was decided to secure a fresh buffalo bait close to the original track where the washer man had been killed. Mactavish could sit over it, while I determined to lie prone on top of one of the boulders close to where Todd had been taken. Our plan was roughly this. Should the two tigers move in company, the cattle-lifter would kill the bait, when, in all probability, although a man-eater, the other tiger would not be able to resist the temptation of a feast, and would also join in. That would provide Mac with a shot. On the other hand, even if it did not join in, the man-eater would probably be in the vicinity; and as the rock on which I was going to lie was in a direct line with the hillock, and along the direction of his approach the previous day, I hoped to be able to hear and see him if he should pass near me.

As there were no trees along the track where Mac was to sit up, we solved the problem of protection by scooping a shallow hole in the earth, over which we decided to place an inverted 'Sugar-cane pan'. These pans resemble huge saucers, and are some six to eight feet in diameter, eighteen inches deep, and beaten from sheet iron about one-eighth of an inch thick. They are used throughout India as containers in which to melt the juice from the sticks of cane sugar, previously gathered by means of crushing through a press. This juice is boiled in the pan and becomes a golden brown liquid, which is then

allowed to cool and solidify, before being cut into four-inch squares to form what is known as 'jaggery' or brown sugar. Jaggery is the only form of sugar used in Southern Indian villages, white sugar being unknown, and practically every village in any fertile area possesses its own cane-sugar plantations, with accompanying 'Sugar-cane pans'. We had already seen a few of them in Hosdurga.

It was not long before we were back from the village with one of these pans, carried by half-a-dozen men, a length of camouflaged tarpaulin, which Mac had brought in his car, and the other necessities for a night sit-up. This pan we inverted over the shallow hole we had dug and was raised from the ground at four points by rocks, so as to provide a six-inch gap for vision and ventilation, and a space through which to shoot. Over the pan we spread the camouflaged tarpaulin, covering this again with a sprinkling of sand dug from the shallow hole, and with a few thorns, cut-bushes, leaves, etc., to give it a realistic appearance. We made a good job of the whole effort, so that the pan looked no more, from a fair distance, than a small hump in the ground.

A further complication now arose as Mac was about to get in, when his wife insisted on sitting with him. We both did our best to dissuade her, but she was adamant, with the result that finally the men and I raised the pan at one end, allowed the Mactavishes to creep in, and then rearranged the whole affair. Actually, I felt it was quite safe inside, the inverted pan providing a sort of armored turret. The bait was then tied, and before going off to the rock on which I was to lie, it was agreed that, in case of need, we were to signal each other by three sharp whistles. I ascended my rock by 5 p.m., settled myself comfortably, and lay prone to await events. I recollect that the stone was uncomfortably hot after having been exposed to direct sunlight throughout the day. There was no sound as the hours dragged by and the forest seemed empty of any form of life. Even the familiar nightjar, welcome now, was absent. The silence was deep and complete, and the stars twinkled down on me in eerie stillness. I fell to thinking of poor Fred Todd, and of what had happened to him.

Midnight passed, when suddenly I heard a clear whistle, twice repeated. It was the agreed signal from Mac, and wondering what had happened to ail him, I slid down from the rock, switched on the torch, and cautiously approached the place where he and his wife were stationed. I came upon them standing beside the buffalo bait, which was alive and untouched. To one side lay the pan that they had over turned in getting out, and this is what they told me. They had seen and heard nothing till about midnight, when Mrs. Mac, sitting directly behind her husband who was facing the buffalo, thought she heard a faint sigh

or moan behind her. Glancing around slowly, and endeavoring to look through the space between the pan and the ground, she had at first noticed nothing. Then she observed what appeared to be a boulder, as big as a bathtub, just six feet away. Remembering that there had been no boulder there earlier in the evening, she had brought her head closer to the opening, and was horrified to see a tiger, lying on the ground on its belly, its forelegs stretched out in front, intently meeting her gaze. Stifling the gasp of surprised horror that almost escaped her, she endeavored, by vigorous nudging, to attract her husband's attention. From his position Mac had seen nothing, and it was almost impossible for him to turn around, for the hole that had originally been dug for one person was too small to allow for the movement of two. Sensing by her continued nudges that something unusual was afoot, Mac had then made a determined effort to turn himself, with the result that the muzzle of his extended rifle contacted the edge of the pan with a slight metallic clang. There was a loud 'Woof' and a thud, as the tiger jumped lightly over the contraption. Knowing that they had been discovered and that no purpose was likely to be served by remaining any longer, they then summoned me by the agreed signal.

To remain longer was useless, so we decided to return to the bungalow at Hosdurga, leaving the bait where it was for the night, pending a decision on some other plan. Early next morning I dispatched a party of men to bring in the bait. They returned with the astounding news that the animal had been killed and entirely devoured. Hastening to the spot, we found their story true. Practically nothing remained of our bait but its head and hooves. Close examination of the ground revealed that two tigers had partaken of the meal, in close proximity, moreover, to the overturned sugar-cane pan and tarpaulin sheet, lying in a heap nearby, both of which had failed to frighten the beasts away.

The deduction to be drawn from this latest development was, therefore, that our man-eater was also a cattle-eater when opportunity offered. Alternatively, there was the possibility that three tigers were operating in the vicinity; a man-eater, and two cattle-killers. For the following night we decided to work to the same plan, tying a fresh bait a quarter-mile further along the same track, and to plant the sugar-cane pan beside it as before, this time making the shallow hole large enough to accommodate both Mac and myself. Mrs. Mac very reluctantly consented to remain in the bungalow. The camouflaged tarpaulin was spread over the pan, under a layer of loose sand and rubble, with grass, thorns and small cut bushes, to give the whole a very realistic appearance of a small rise in the ground. Mac and I sat back-to-back, rifles ready, with Mac facing the bait. On this occasion

we also provided for a slightly greater aperture to allow more shooting space, by using larger stones at the four opposite ends of the pan.

Mac and I sat thus throughout three nights in succession, but we saw and heard nothing. But about 10 o'clock on the fourth morning, while we were having a nap in the bungalow, news arrived that a man had been killed a mile from Holalkere, in the same date-palm grove where we had shot the bear some days earlier, and almost at the same spot. Hastening there by car, we were both disgusted and annoyed to find that the relations of the latest victim had in the meantime removed his body for cremation, so that we lost the chance of sitting-up over this human kill, to which the tiger might possibly have returned.

We then procured another buffalo bait at Holalkere, and tied it within fifty yards of the place where the man had been killed. A convenient tree overlooked the road at this spot, and on this tree I erected a machan. As Mac was feeling a bit seedy, and was tired after his vigil of four consecutive nights, he decided to rest on that occasion and I sat up alone.

Again nothing happened, and 6 a.m. found me trudging the mile towards Holalkere with mixed feelings of tiredness, disappointment and disgust. Arriving there, I sent men out to bring back the bait. They came running back in half-an-hour with the news that, as they were about to untie the animal, a tiger had growled in the jungle within a few yards of them. They had then rushed pell-mell back to Holalkere, leaving the buffalo where it was.

Jumping into the car, we hastened to the spot and were truly surprised to find our bait still alive. This was very unexpected, as we were certain that the tiger, or tigers, would have killed the buffalo as soon as the fleeing men were out of sight. Taking a chance, I went up into the machan at once, instructing Mac to return to Holalkere. There was just a possibility, I felt, that the tiger might turn up.

Nothing happened, and as at 1 p.m. I was feeling both hungry and sleepy, I then got down, untied the bait, and walked along with it to Holalkere. That night, we retied the bait at the same spot, and I sat up once again. Mac and his wife went to Hosdurga in the car, and sat up together under the sugar-cane pan, beside the bait we had left there, in the spot where he and I had sat for three consecutive nights.

Again nothing happened, and by 6.30 am. they came along in the car from Hosdurga, picked me up, and proceeded to the bungalow at Holalkere, where we all went to sleep after lunch. At 4 p.m. we were awakened by a great hubbub. Restoring some order in the throng that

had collected in the verandah, we came to learn that a company of a dozen men had left Holalkere before noon to drive a herd of cattle to Chitaldroog for market, intending to cover the intervening distance long before sunset. About three miles from Holalkere one of the cattle had strayed from the main road for a short distance of perhaps twenty-five yards. A man who had gone to drive it back was attacked by a tiger that had evidently been flanking the party, and was in hiding in the very bushes that bordered the roadside. Being cut off from retreat to his friends on the road, he had rushed up a rock that happened to be nearby. The whole scene had occurred in full view of the party, all of whom stood huddled together in a bunch and failed to render help of any sort, so stricken were they with fear.

The tiger had then sprung up the rock and fastened the claws of a forepaw in the man's thigh, attempting to pull him down. The man, continuing to scream for help, had clung with both hands to the branch of a tree that over hung the rock, to save himself from being dragged down. The first attack failed, and the tiger slipped backwards to earth, its claws practically peeling the skin from the man's thigh, till it hung like the skin of a partially stripped banana. Becoming infuriated, and no doubt urged on by the sight of human blood, the tiger then made a second attempt, this time fastening both its forepaws squarely in the body of the man and dragging him from his feeble hold. Once it got him down from the rock it had seized him by the neck and bounded off into the forest.

It was a matter of minutes to reach the spot by car. Evidence of the fresh tragedy was available in abundance, the bits of human skin and fingernails embedded in the broken branch testifying to the intensity of that last desperate hold. Spattered blood could be seen everywhere, and there was a distinct trail where the victim had been carried away.

We followed this up in all haste, the trail leading down wards to a valley of dense jungle. It was past 5 p.m. and we had exactly an hour to find the body before dark. Soon we discovered the usual pieces of tattered clothing, then a dark pool of blood where the tiger had deposited his victim, only to go on downwards into the dark valley. Perhaps six furlongs had been covered in this way when we came upon a low out-crop of rock, interspersed with bushes. I was surprised to find that the tiger had not yet stopped to begin its meal, as this was a quiet and secluded spot; but hardly had the thought entered my mind, when a distinct growl came from behind a large rock, followed by the sound of a small stone being dislodged, as the tiger bounded away before we could even see it. Rounding the bend, we encountered the corpse, weltering in its own blood, and about one-third devoured. Time

was passing, there was no suitable tree nearby, and the only possible place to sit was on top of the largest of the neighboring rocks, which was about twelve feet high. This rock rose steeply on three sides and was fairly safe against a tiger's spring, but unfortunately it sloped on the fourth side, and still more unfortunate was the fact that this sloping side did not face the dead man but was a little more than a right angle from the body's position. This meant that if I lay on top of the rock I would have to keep a careful watch in two directions, namely, on the corpse below me to the left, and on the sloping side of rock to my right, for fear that the tiger might make a sudden rush up this and be on to me before I was aware of it. As I have said, I considered my rear, which faced one of the sides where the rock dropped steeply, fairly safe against a sudden spring, to do which the tiger would have to leap a clean twelve feet to the top of the rock. If he did not clear that height in one jump, he would have no hold at all and would slip backwards, which would give me ample time to shoot. No tiger, in my opinion, would risk such an uncertain jump.

Screening the top of the rock on the sloping side with a few small stones and bushes, I scrambled up, after telling the Macs to spend part of the night in driving up and down between Holalkere and Hosdurga in the hope of meeting the tiger on the road, in case it had abandoned the kill. With the departure of my friends and the villagers, I was now alone with the mangled remains that were strewn on the ground below me. The hours passed, while I kept an intent watch on the sloping rock to my right. The jungle beyond was hidden in darkness, and appeared just a blur in the hazy background, against which it was impossible to distinguish any animal smaller than an elephant. In the gloom the corpse to my left could no longer be seen.

At about ten o'clock a sambar belled in the distant forest a mile away. This was followed by a tiger calling, which was answered shortly by another tiger in the direction of the road from which we had come. The complexity of the situation was now fully apparent, as I thought the matter over during those silent hours. We had at least two tigers operating in the area, possibly three. Of these, one was a man-killer, daring, cruel and ruthless. The other was a cattle lifter, equally daring and cunning by nature. But this did not necessarily mean that either of the tigers refrained from indulging in both habits, when occasion presented. Again there was the possibility of a third tiger operating in the district, which might itself be a man-eater, or a cattle-lifter, or both. So far, due to the dry weather and hard ground, we had been prevented from picking up any distinguishing pugmarks to be able to identify these various animals. The tigers had ceased calling by now, and all was silent again in the surrounding forest except for the

chirping of the tree crickets, the occasional hoot of an owl, and the periodic sound of a gust of wind bending the tops of the giant trees, a sound like the roar of a distant sea. Then suddenly, and without warning or premonition, it happened ! There was a thud against the rock behind me, a violent scratching and scraping against the stone, mingled with a snarling growl, and then another thud as the tiger fell backwards to the ground. Before I could turn and peer over the edge of the rock, he was gone. That man-eater had done the unexpected thing! Having somehow become aware of my presence, he had stalked me from behind and attempted a sheer leap of twelve feet to the top of the rock where I was lying. By good fortune he had failed to make it by a few inches.

I spent the rest of the night sitting up and fully alert, but nothing occurred. I waited till the sun had risen high next morning before venturing to scramble down and return to the road, as I feared the tiger, having discovered my presence, might be lying in ambush for me, but again my luck held out and I reached the road in safety, where Mac came for me in the car in a few minutes, having himself spent a fruitless night in driving up and down between Holalkere and Hosdurga.

Immediately upon arrival at the bungalow I instructed a party of men to return to the human remains and cover them with branches to protect them against vultures, as I intended to sit up again on the rock that night. These men were just setting out, however, when the relatives of the dead man arrived from his village and demanded the remains for cremation. I attempted to persuade them to allow the body to stay where it was for another day. They were adamant, and so any opportunity that might have presented itself of avenging the death of that poor man that night was lost to us through the obstinacy of his relations.

Two hours later, a party of men arrived from Hosdurga to inform us that our bait, which had been left tied near the sugar-cane pan for the past week, had at last been killed. Evening found Mac and myself sitting under the pan, and about midnight we heard a tiger moving around in the vicinity, by the intermittent low grunt it was making every now and then. We waited anxiously for it to come on to the kill but this it would not do, and kept circling the area for the best part of three-quarters of an hour. Quite obviously it had discovered our presence near the kill. A brave but foolhardy idea now entered Mac's mind, which was that he should get up and walk away to give the tiger the impression we had left and that his kill was alone. He hoped it would then approach and I could deal with it.

The plan was likely to meet with success, as you will remember that this is exactly what happened on the last occasion we had left the pan and our bait. At the same time it was a very dangerous thing for Mac to do, in view of the fact that the tiger hovering near might be the man-eater itself, or might be accompanied by the man-eater, as on an earlier occasion. It took me quite thirty minutes to drive the idea from the head of that stubborn but magnificently brave Scotsman, that to venture out in the dark jungle with a man-eater about would be to sign his own death warrant.

In the meantime the tiger continued to prowl around, but went off in the early hours of the morning, and we returned to the little bungalow at Hosdurga, after yet another night of disappointment.

Nothing happened the two following days, the nights of which we spent driving up and down between Hosdurga, Holalkere and Chitaldroog, flashing the spotlight in the hope of meeting one of the tigers on the road. Early on the morning of the third day a party of Lumbani woodcutters reported that they had been camped in the forest four miles away the previous night, in the protection of a huge campfire, around which they had drawn their five carts in a rough circle, and within which they and their five bullocks were sheltering. At dead of night the fire having burnt low, a tiger had crept past the carts and attacked one of the bulls. The rest had stampeded around, awakening the men, who had shouted and thrown firebrands at the tiger. It had then decamped. The bull had been bitten through the neck and severely scratched as well, but it was alive. At dawn they had come on to Hosdurga with four carts and the injured bullock, abandoning the fifth cart, which the bullock was too badly hurt to haul.

One of these Lumbanis, who had been in the area from childhood and knew the forest like the palm of his hand, mentioned that six miles away, in the heart of the forest, was a small stream leading to a clear pool surrounded by sloping rocks, under giant trees. It was in this locality, he asserted, that the tigers had their permanent abode. Now that it was summer, they spent the hours of noonday heat in this cool retreat, and invariably one or other of them would drink at this pool in the evening before setting out on its hunt for prey, or in the early hours of the morning, after returning from the hunt.

This man evidently knew what he was talking about, for intimate speech with him revealed that he was a poacher and a boot-legger to wit, who made quite a lot of money by illicitly distilling in the fastnesses of the forest a very potent liquor called 'arrack' from the bark of the babul tree. Evidently few knew of this place, and those who did dared

not venture there, for fear of the tigers. The upshot of the conversation was that it was agreed Mac and I would leave with him after lunch that day to spend the evening, night and following morning at this pool.

3 p.m. found us at the spot, and a more likely tiger-haunt I have seldom seen. The pool was a small one, entirely surrounded by sloping rock, but the banks of the tiny stream that fed it amply revealed the presence of tiger, by repeated tracks that led down to and crossed it. A rough survey of these tracks indicated the pugmarks of two separate animals, a large male and an adult female. From the repeated reports of its large size, the former was in all probability the cattle-lifter, leaving now definite cause for suspicion that his companion, the female, might be the man-eater unless, of course, there was a third tiger in the party.

A wild mango tree overhung the pool at almost the spot where the stream ran in, and on the lower branches of this tree, at about the height of fifteen feet, we put up my portable 'charpoy' machan, which we had brought along with us for just such an occasion, carried by the Lumbani. 4.30 p.m. found all three of us sitting on this machan, it being dangerous to send the Lumbani away by himself, for fear of the man-eater. On account of the overhanging big trees, it was pitch-dark by 7 o'clock, nor did any animals visit the vicinity; no doubt they avoided it because of the habitual proximity of the Kings of the Jungle. The hours dragged by in solemn silence, disturbed once or twice by the distant calls of Sambar and Kakur, or barking-deer.

It must have been past 4 a.m. when we heard a slight sighing, moaning sound, and then the unmistakably heavy but softly muffled tread of a tiger on the carpet of fallen bamboo leaves that covered the sloping bank that faced us. Minutes passed, but we could see nothing in that stygian darkness. Then we heard the distant sound of the lapping of water from the edge of the pool down below in the darkness, and to our right.

The time had come, and as previously agreed, I gently nudged Mac to take the shot. Pointing his rifle in the direction of the sound, while I kept ready for a covering shot if necessary, Mac depressed the torch-switch and the bright beam streamed down upon the form of an immense tiger crouched over the water's edge. The beast looked up, his eyes reflecting the light in two large, gleaming red-white orbs, and then Mac fired. There was a roar as the tiger sprang into the air to turn a complete somersault and fall over backwards, biting the ground and lashing out in a furious medley of bubbling, snarling growls. Mac followed up with two more shots before the tiger rolled over, half into

the water, to twitch in the throes of approaching death, then to lie still.

With the dawn we descended, to find that Mac had shot the male of the party. He was a truly magnificently proportioned tiger and a wonderful trophy, but we were all disappointed to know that the man-eater was still at large. Mac's first shot had struck the animal at the top of its nose, smashing the upper jaw and palate, and passing into the throat, which accounted for the bubbling sound we had heard with its snarls. His second shot had passed through the right shoulder and into the abdomen. The third had missed.

I will pass over the events of the next four days, during which no reports were received, and the local population began congratulating us on having slain the man-eater, the opinion of some being that it was this same tiger that had killed both man and cattle. But we knew better and lingered on, certain that sooner or later we would receive news of another human kill, unless of course the man-eater had left the area after the death of its companion. The nights of those four days we spent in driving along the road up to Chitaldroog, and along all passable forest tracks, in the hope of meeting the man-eater, but without success.

Shortly before noon on the fifth day came the news we had feared but anticipated, in the form of three runners dispatched by the Amildar at Chitaldroog to acquaint us with the fact that, late the previous evening, a lad aged fourteen years had been carried away by a tiger from a hamlet at the base of the southern slopes of the hillock of Togi-mutt', which I have already told you lay to the south of the town of Chitaldroog itself, and boasted an ancient, abandoned fort on its summit. Driving there by car, we visited the hamlet and were shown the small hut on its outskirts, from the very door of which the lad had been snatched at sundown the previous evening. As the country to the south of the hamlet was practically bare, there was good reason for believing, along with the inhabitants of the village, that the tiger had carried its victim up the hill, and was probably at that moment sheltering in the ruins of the fort. No organized attempt at searching for the body had been made and only four hours of daylight remained to us when we assembled a party of half-a-dozen men and began to climb the hill.

It was soon apparent that the tiger had not carried its victim up the main footpath leading to the top of the hill, which we more than half ascended without finding a vestige or trace of the victim. Climbing neighboring boulders as we advanced, I instructed men to look in all directions for anything that became visible, and when about three-

quarters of the way up one of these men reported vultures sitting in a tree about a quarter-mile to our left. Scrambling across the intervening rocks and thorny bushes, we eventually came upon the remains of the boy, completely devoured, by this time, by the vultures.

There appeared little use or hope in sitting up over the bones, especially as we knew from experience that the killer seldom returned to such a meal. Nevertheless, Mac and two men put up my machan on the tree on which the vultures had been sitting and decided to remain there, while I felt I had just enough time to ascend the rest of the hill and look among the ruins. Regaining the path, I hurried upwards, and reached the ruins just after 5 p.m. The walls of the fort had long since crumbled into decay, and a sea of lantana and thorny undergrowth covered the area as well as the old moat that lay outside. At this point, the remaining four men in the party elected to remain outside; to await my return they ascended to the top-most branches of a tall fig-tree., the gnarled roots of which bit deep into the debris of the fort's wall.

Proceeding cautiously, I endeavored to keep on top of the fallen wall, as far as it was negotiable, in order to maintain some elevation above the surrounding lantana, which was both impassable as well as dangerous to enter, as I would not be able to see the tiger in that undergrowth even were it but a yard away. Progress was most difficult and strenuous, and by the time I had reached the opposite end of the fort, I was breathing heavily from my exertions and bathed in perspiration. Here I faced the sun as the golden orb neared the western horizon.

Years ago I had been over the same fort, and I knew that about this spot were the almost-completely engulfed remains of walled enclosures and what had been dungeons in the distant long-ago. Because of these structures the wall at this point became impossible to follow. I was loath to step down into the lantana, but it soon became apparent that I would either have to do this and struggle through a distance of about one hundred yards to where the wall began again, or retrace my steps. Time was also against me; so to avoid delay I finally decided to risk the lantana, which I commenced to push my way through, as silently as I was able. But this soon turned out to be impossible, for the lantana twigs, covered with minute thorns, clung to my clothing at each step and made considerable noise as I broke my way through.

I knew I was now opposite the remains of the dungeons and enclosures, and that here, if anywhere in this deserted ruin, was where the tiger would most likely be hiding. At the same time, no doubt keyed

up as I was by the unfavourableness of my position, my tensed nerves and senses signaled the proximity of danger. A sixth sense cried out that the tiger was near and on my trail, watching me for the moment of attack, which would take place very soon if I did not escape from the lantana. I had felt these warnings too often to ignore them, so while trebling my vigilance and looking in all directions, I pressed forward to higher ground. Thirty yards more twenty yards more fifteen yards

more and then from the lantana to my left rose the snarling head of a tiger, its ears laid back in preparation for the spring, its jaws wide open to reveal the gleaming canines. My bullet crashed into the wide-open mouth, as the animal launched itself forward. Rushing blindly on to gain higher ground, I all but lost my eyes in the intervening lantana, the thorns tearing my flesh and clothing, while pandemonium broke loose behind me.

With the back of its head blown out, that tiger tried to get me, and when I had covered those remaining fifteen yards and spun around, it was but two yards away, with a great gaping red hole where half its skull had once been. Almost beside myself with terror, I crashed a second, third and fourth bullet into the beast and as, shattered, it toppled on its side, I sat on a piece of the ruin, shaken, sick and faint.

Ten minutes later I struggled to my feet, and avoiding the bloody mass before me, returned to the tree where I had left the four men, by completing the circuit of the remaining fort wall.

Hearing the four shots and the snarls of the tiger, they had concluded I had been killed, and were debating whether to come down from their tree and hasten back to their hamlet, or spend the rest of the night in its branches. It was quite obvious they had never expected to see me alive again. Collecting them, we had hardly covered a furlong when we were met by Mac and the other two men. From where he was sitting, he too had heard my four shots and, like the staunch friend he was, had hurried forward to give any assistance I might need. As it was, seeing me tattered, scratched and bleeding from my rush through the lantana, his ruddy face drained to a chalky white and he ran for ward to hold me, thinking I had been mauled. Squatting there, I told him what had happened, while I puffed clouds of smoke from my cherished briar and received his warm congratulations. Indeed, I could not help remarking, as I smoked that soothing pipeful of tobacco that I had never expected to smoke again, when I saw that terrible face, contorted with its lust to kill, but a few feet away.

Later that night we carried the tiger down, hoisted it on the car and

took it to Chitaldroog town. As we had expected, it proved to be female and was undoubtedly the man-eater that had killed the boy. Its aggressiveness to wards me also justified this conclusion. Early next morning, while skinning the animal, we were visited by the Amildar, who wanted to see the devil that had killed his relative, the little girl at Hosdurga, by the District Forest Officer and no other officials, and by hundreds of the inhabitants. It was late that evening before we could leave for Bangalore with the skins of the two tigers that had formed such an exceptional and unheard-of combination, as cattle-killer and man-eater hunting together.

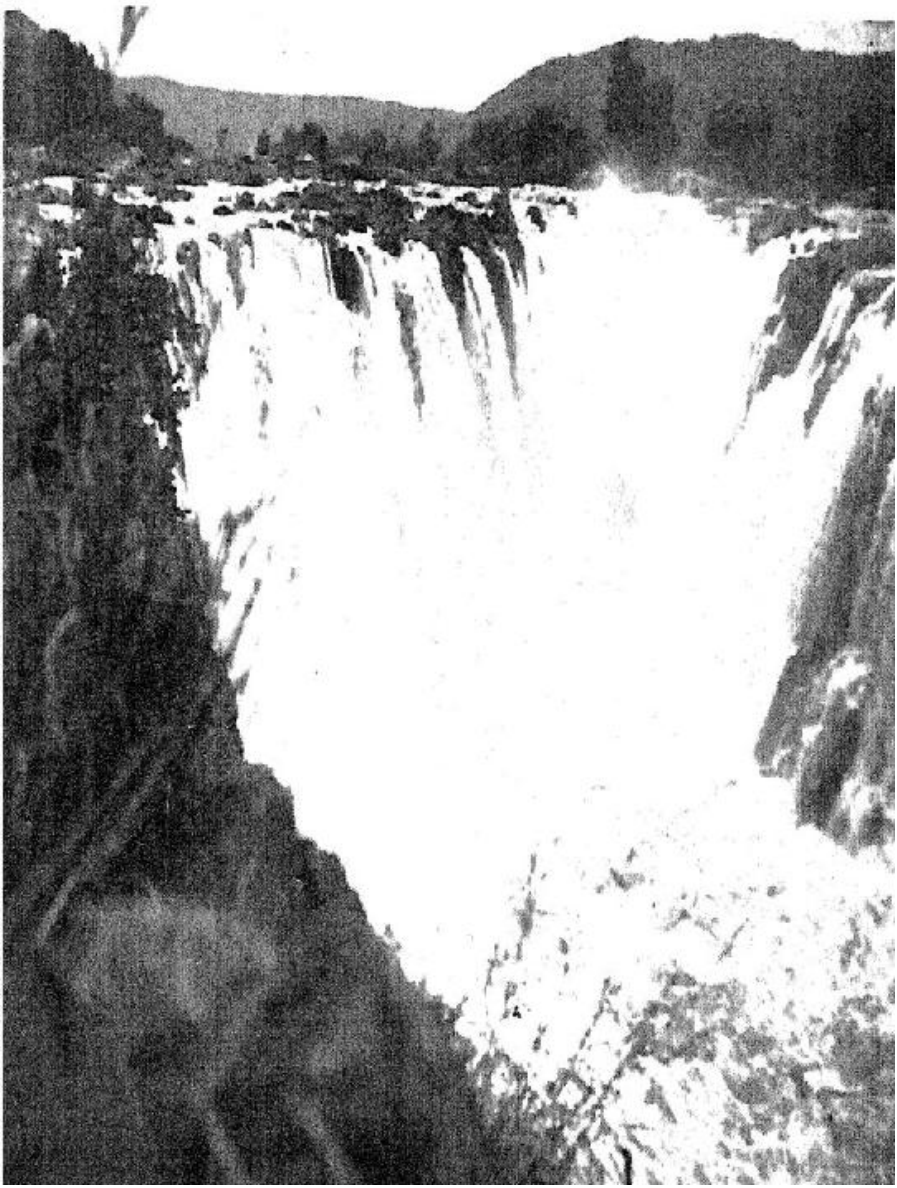
Incidentally, skinning the tigress revealed no sign of the reason for her having become a man-eater. As I have already said, this district had a long history of man-eaters behind it, extending for generations past, and I am of the opinion that this tigress came of man-eating stock. Such an explanation would also account for her mate, the big male that Mac had shot, being a normal cattle-lifter that had not touched human flesh. The tigress had probably only met this male during the mating season that was just over it lasts from November to January and had not been with him long enough to infect him with her man-eating habits. Had she littered she would have undoubtedly have taught her cabs the taste for human flesh, just as she herself had been taught, and so have extended the generations of man-eaters of that district.

The third tiger, whose existence we had suspected, never materialized, for before leaving we left word with all the officials, as well as people, to inform us at once if a third tiger was heard of. This was because we felt there was always the remote possibility that the third tiger might also be the man-eater. But months passed and we received the glad tidings that all reports of man-eating had ceased throughout the district after the killing of that tigress on the summit of Togi-mutt'.

Fred Todd, and the rest of her victims, had been avenged.

The Rogue-Elephant of Panapatti

The Falls of Hogenaikal, with the Cauvery River in flood



A shikar party prepares to cross the Cauvery River as sun sets.

HE was a small animal, as rogue elephants go, standing about seven feet and a half in his socks. This could be gauged by the tracks of his forefoot, twice the circumference of which gives, to within a couple of inches, the height of an Indian elephant. But what he lacked in stature he made up for in courage, cold calculating cunning, and an implacable hatred of the human race, whom he had evidently made it his ambition to decimate, as and when the opportunity presented itself.

He had one tusk, about 18 inches long, while the other had been broken off short, by (it was said) the big leader of the herd inhabiting the banks of the Cauvery River and the jungle fastnesses that comprised the forest block of Wodapatti, in which was situated the cattle-pen of Panapatti, in the district of Salem. This youngster, before he became a rogue, had evidently been ambitious and was more than normally high-spirited, for he had thrust his unwelcome attentions upon the ladies of the herd under the very eyes of their lord and master. A warning scream of resentment and rage from the leader had had no salutary effect, and the youngster had offered battle when the tusker had attempted to drive him away.

This had led to a major encounter, in which years, experience and greater weight had told heavily in favor of the leader. The youngster had eventually bolted, battered and beaten, with vicious gashes in his sides, inflicted by the powerful tusks of the bigger male, while one of his own tusks had been snapped off short in the fray, no doubt to give

him bad toothache for many days to come.

He had wandered in this condition, morose and surly, in the vicinity of the herd, but never daring to enter it, when one day, as he was walking down a forest cart-track, he had turned a corner to come suddenly face to face with a buffalo cart, laden with bamboos that had been felled for the contractor. A blind rage had seized him at that moment, together with a deep urge to get his own back on something. Madly he rushed at the cart, and the driver just escaped by jumping off and fleeing for life. But the unfortunate buffaloes were yoked to the heavily laden vehicle and stood helpless to the onslaught. The rogue for rogue he had now become proceeded to smash the cart to matchwood, before turning his attentions on the buffaloes. One he seized by its long, curving horn, and flung bodily down the embankment that bordered the track, where it was found next day with its horn torn out from the roots; one of its fore-legs had suffered a compound fracture, and the broken, exposed bone had dug itself into the soft earth with the force of the fall, so that the weight of the animal effectively anchored it to the spot. The remaining buffalo it had gored with its one tusk, but this animal had bolted down the track, dragging the broken yoke of the cart behind it, and so escaped the fate of its less fortunate companion.

Thereafter the elephant steadily worsened his reputation, and many an unfortunate wayfarer to the river had gone to his death beneath its massive feet or, caught by that terrible trunk, had been beaten to pulp against the bole of a forest tree.

My first experience with this animal was by accident. I had gone down to Hogenaikal, on the banks of the Cauvery River and about four miles from Panapatti, for a weekend’s mahseer fishing and to secure a crocodile if opportunity presented. As rumor had it, at that time the rogue was not in the locality, having crossed the river to the Coimbatore bank in wake of the elephant herd, which had wandered there in search of fresh pasture.

In the evening of the second day, after having met with indifferent fishing, I had returned to the forest lodge for tea, when the call of a peacock close at hand had tempted me to go after the bird, which I hoped would make me a tasty roast for that night's dinner. Slipping a couple of No. 1 shot into the breach of my shotgun, I cut diagonally across the forest to the glen where the peacock was calling. Reaching it, I stepped cautiously forward in an effort to locate my quarry, eventually arriving at the dry bed of the Chinar stream, a tributary of the Cauvery River, which it joined a mile further down.

My rubber-soled boots made no noise on the soft sand. I could hear the rustle of the peacock's feathers as it preened its tail somewhere behind the bushes on the opposite bank, and was just tiptoeing across the stream, when a shrill, trumpeting blast smote the silence, to be followed by the crashing bulk of the rogue as it broke cover fifty yards away and swiftly bore down on me. Realizing the futility of attempting to escape by running away for elephants can cover ground at an astonishing speed and I had no chance of out-distancing him, because of the hampering soft sand and clinging thorny shrubs of the neighboring jungle I covered the curled trunk in the sights of my shot-gun and fired both barrels at a range of about thirty yards.

The noise of the report and the stinging missiles stopped him momentarily and, while he screamed with rage and defiance, I fled up the path by which I had come, carrying my empty gun, at a pace I had never thought myself capable of attaining. Arriving at the Forest Bungalow, I seized my rifle and ran back again. But there was nothing to be seen on the deserted sands of the Chinar stream, and upon approaching the spot I found the rogue had swerved into the forest on the opposite side, where I did not care to follow him, as night was approaching. The next day I had to return to Bangalore on business and could not possibly extend my stay, so I left the honors of the first round entirely to the rogue of Panapatti.

This creature, through his notoriety, had been declared as an undesirable or 'rogue' elephant by the Government, and official notification had been broadcast by the Forest Department, both in print and locally by beat-of-drum, or 'tom-tom' as it is officially called, offering a Government reward of Rs.soo (about £34) for its destruction. An Indian gentleman of the locality then very bravely determined to put an end to the elephant's career and claim the reward. The details of his attempt as I later pieced it together were as follows.

Armed with a .500 double-barreled black-powder Express rifle, which had seen better days, he arrived at Panapatti and was told that the elephant was wandering in the adjacent Wodapatti Forest Block. The same Chinar stream, on the bed of which, near Hogenaikal I had nearly met my end beneath the monster's feet, curves gracefully past Panapatti and meanders through the forest, its north-western bank forming the boundary of the Wodapatti Reserve, and its opposite bank that of the Pennagram Block.

The Indian gentleman of whom I am speaking, having tried for two days without success to meet the rogue, spent the night of the third day in his tent about two miles with in the Pennagram Block, away

from the Chinar Stream and the Wodapatti Range, out of which the elephant was said never to stray. But as a precaution he had his followers build a ring of campfires around their two tents, and the men were given instructions to keep plenty of firewood in reserve for replenishing and stoking the fires during the night watches.

All then being peaceful, he apparently fell fast asleep; so, evidently, did his followers. In the early hours of the morning the rogue came upon this peaceful scene. The fires had perhaps died low, with just their embers glowing. Normally, no elephant or any other animal will go anywhere near a fire. But the sight of the white tent and the urge to destroy proved too strong for this beast, for he carefully made his way through at a point where there was no fire and rushed upon the tent with a scream of rage.

The camp followers awoke at the pandemonium created and, realizing the demon was upon them, scattered and fled in all directions. The unfortunate occupant of the white tent had no chance to use his timeworn Express. The structure fell about his ears and was trampled flat beneath the huge bulk of the elephant, which then proceeded to tear it to ribbons. It was while engaged in this congenial task that it came upon the hunter, alive or dead at that time, nobody knows. Curling its dreaded trunk around him, it carried him off in triumph to the clearing of a forest line, which passed nearby. There it literally rubbed him into the ground beneath its huge feet, till nothing remained of the human body but a pulpy mass of bloody flesh and crushed bones, mixed with sand from the forest line. Finally, not liking the smell of blood, it tossed the bloody mass far away and returned to the fastnesses of the Wodapatti block.

As a result of this incident, the Government reward was doubled to Rs. 1ooo/-, while I determined to begin my second round against the elephant. Arriving at Panapatti, I visited the scene of the recent tragedy, where I could not help wondering at the audacity of the bloodthirsty elephant in actually penetrating the circle of fires. The spot nearby, where it had rubbed its victim into the ground, was also clearly evident, although the remains had long since been demolished by vultures. Returning to Panapatti, I requisitioned the aid of one of the cattlemen from the adjoining cattle-pen, who was also a fair tracker, to help me find the animal. Tracks there were a-plenty across the sands of the Chinar stream, but the problem was to find and follow one that had been freshly made. This it was impossible to do, for the good reason that the elephant had evidently made off from the vicinity, and was either somewhere within the Wodapatti block, or had wandered across the low hills to the main Cauvery River, which flowed, as I have

stated, some four miles away.

The Wodapatti bank was clothed, for a couple of miles down the Chinar stream, with a species of tall flowering grass, whose roots subsist on sub-soil moisture and which attained a height of ten feet in places, topped by beautiful heads of flowering stems which somewhat resembled the flowering heads of cane-sugar, but were of greater length and much finer texture. In the early mornings, droplets of dew, which had gathered overnight on the fine strands of these flowering heads, glittered in the rays of the rising sun, giving a fairy-like appearance to the graceful fronds and a vision of beauty and peace, which entirely belied the danger that threatened upon entering the grassy belt. The stems had grown to such height and thick profusion that one could not see more than a yard ahead, and to walk through the grass, one had to part the stems with one hand, holding the rifle in the other. A herd of elephants might have lurked within, and nothing could have been seen of them until almost within touching distance. The tracks made by the rogue in his previous excursions were marked by crushed and bent stems, and even these were rapidly reassuming their upright positions. The grass belt varied in width from 100 to 200 yards.

As the hills at this point abutted the Chinar Stream, the jungle was represented by giant bamboo, traversing which was almost as dangerous as crossing the flowering grass. Fallen bamboos lay in profusion everywhere, their spiky ends impeding both advance and retreat. The tall boughs, clothed with their feathered leaves, curved gracefully overhead, bending and creaking to the forest breezes. We spent four whole days searching for the elephant, laboriously traversing the grass belt and the bamboos, crossing the range of foot-hills and descending their further slopes till the purling waters of the Cauvery River flowed past our feet as it hastened to the falls and cataracts at Hogenaikal, the great Mettur Dam some 35 miles down stream, then the eastern plain of Erode and the city of Trichinopoly, and finally the distant Bay of Bengal. In all this time, never a fresh track of the rogue did we see. The afternoon of the fifth day found my guide and my self again on the banks of the Cauvery River, when I decided to follow the bank upstream in the hope of finding some trace of my quarry. We had advanced with considerable difficulty about three miles, stepping over the giant roots of the tall 'Muthee' trees that clothed the bank and ran down into the water for sustenance, interspersed with brakes of tall flowering-grass, when we came upon the fresh tracks of an elephant which had evidently crossed the river early that morning from the opposite bank of the Coimbatore District. Rough measurements revealed that they tallied with the spoor of the

rogue.

Tracking now became easy, for we had a definite trail to follow, and the footprints and heavy bulk of the elephant had made a clear path through grass, bamboo and undergrowth.

The spoor led up and across a small foothill, near the top of which we came upon a heap of dung. Although quite fresh, this lacked that warmth to the touch, which would have shown that it had been very recently cast. So we followed on, down into a deep valley. Here we found still fresher dung, but not warm to the touch, which showed that our quarry was yet some distance ahead. We struggled up the adjoining slope and across two more foothills, and then observed that the tracks suddenly slued round and made back in the general direction of the Cauvery River.

We were overcome by a fear that the animal had escaped us by returning across the Cauvery. Going forward as fast as possible, we came upon another heap of dung together with the mark of urine, which had soaked, into the ground. But this time minute traces of froth showed in the sand and the dung was warm to the touch. At last our quarry was not very far ahead, nor was the Cauvery River ! Our further progress turned almost into a race to reach the river at the same time as the elephant, and before it crossed out of rifle range. From fallen branches, oozing with freshly flowing sap, we could observe that the pachyderm was grazing casually as it approached the river.

Finally, a sharp dip in the land and a murmur of sound told us that we had almost reached the river's bank, and soon the glint of water between tree-stems told us that we were there. Silently and cautiously we crept forward. The sand became soft. Then we noticed that the elephant, instead of crossing, as we had feared, had changed its mind and walked upstream and across a grassy bank. Here it was apparent that the spoor was very recent, for the tender blades of grass were fast embedded in the moist ooze, from which bubbles of air burst before our eyes. We had gone another 150 yards when we observed that a creek lay ahead, and as we came abreast of it we heard the noise of splashing and the hollow sound of air being blown through an elephant's trunk. Our quarry was having a bath.

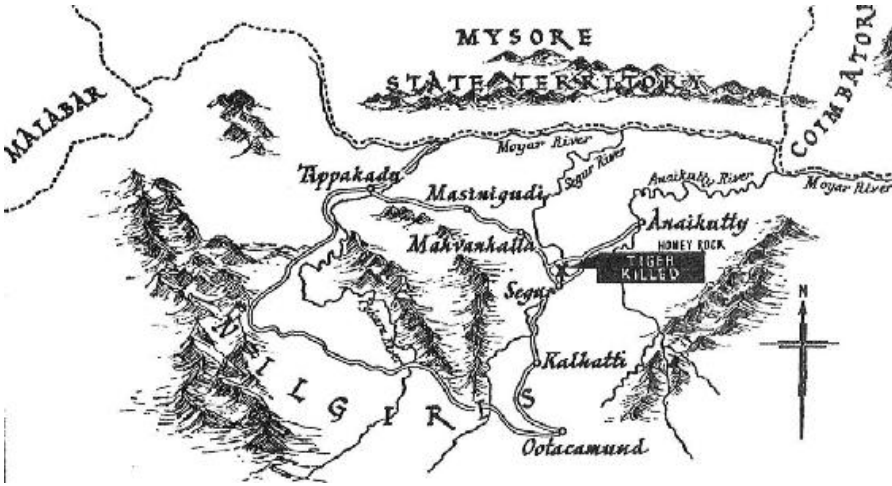
Fortunately, the little breeze that blew was in our direction, and as we parted the intervening twigs and stems of grass, we saw an elephant lying on its side in the water, but facing away from us. In this position, it was impossible to tell whether the animal was the rogue, or a wandering elephant from among the several herds that inhabited both

banks of the river. So we settled down to watch. After a further five minutes of snorting, blowing and splashing, the animal suddenly rose and began to walk in a leisurely way across the creek. In all this time it had not shown its head, nor had we been able to see whether it had two tusks, or a broken stump at one side. The situation now called for early decision, as once the elephant reached the thick verdure clothing the opposite bank of the creek, it would be lost to view. So I snapped my thumb and finger twice in quick succession. The sound, infinitesimal as it must have been, penetrated the keen hearing of the elephant. With a swish and a swirl of water it spun around, and there before us stood the 'rogue of Panapatti', the stump of his broken left tusk clearly in view, while the right tusk, small as it was, curved viciously up wards. Within a second his small eyes located us, his trunk curled inwards, and with his head raised and his small tail sticking out ridiculously, screaming with triumph and hate, he charged across the intervening water, bent on yet another lustful killing.

My .405 spoke once, the heavy solid bullet speeding straight to its mark beneath the coiling trunk and into the throat. The animal stopped dead in its tracks, while gout of blood spurted from the severed jugular. It turned sideways in an attempt to make off, when two more rounds both found their marks in vital places, one in the soft depression of the temple, and the other behind the huge ear as it flapped forward.

The great bulk stood still, then shivered as if stricken with terrible ague, and finally collapsed, as if pole-axed, in the shallow waters of the creek, which rapidly became reddened with blood, as the rays of the late afternoon sun vanished beneath the rim of the towering peak of mount Ponachi Malai on the Coimbatore bank, sending streaks of crimson light into the orange sky.

The Man-Eater of Segur



THE hamlet of Segur is situated at the foot of the northeastern slopes of the well-known Nilgiri Mountains in South India, or 'Blue Mountains', which is what the word 'Nilgiri' literally means. On the summit of this lovely range stands the beautiful health resort of Ootacamund, at an average elevation of 7,506 feet above mean sea level. This 'Queen of Hill Stations', as it is affectionately termed, is the focal point of visitors from all the length and breadth of India. Ootacamund has a charm of its own, with a climate that allows the growth of all types of English flowers and vegetables to perfection. The all-prevailing scent of the towering eucalyptus ('blue-gum') trees, which is wafted across the station from the surrounding plantations, mingled with that of the fir and pine, makes memories of 'Ooty' unforgettable, and with its cool climate gives a welcome change to the visitor from the heat and enervating temperature of the sweltering plains far below.

A steep ghat-road, 12 miles in length, leaves Ootacamund, and after passing through graceful, rolling downs, where foxhunting was once a pastime of the English residents the local jackal taking the place of the fox drops sharply downwards to Segur, at the foot of the range, where dense tropical forests prevail. The road is so steep in places as to be almost unusable, except to motor cars of fairly high power. At Segur the road bifurcates, one branch running northwestwards through dense forest, past the hamlet of Mahvanhalla and the village of Masinigudi, to meet the main trunk road, linking the cities of Bangalore and Mysore with Ootacamund, at the forest chowki of Tippakadu. The other

bifurcation leads eastwards through equally dense forest, along the base of the Blue Mountains, to the forest bungalow of Anaikutty, nine miles away. Two perennial streams water this area, the Segur River and the Anaikutty River, both descending in silvery cascades from the Blue mountains; here their waters run through giant tropical forests to join those of the Moyar River, some fifteen miles away. The Moyar River, or 'Mysore Ditch', as it is known, forms the boundary between the native state of Mysore on the north, the district of Coimbatore on the northeast, and the Nilgiri Range with its foothills on the south, both Coimbatore and the Nilgiris forming part of the Province of Madras. The evergreen forests of the Malabar- Wynaad extend to the west and south-west.

The Purling waters of the Anaikutty River

All the areas mentioned are densely wooded, hold game preserves on the Mysore, Malabar, and Nilgiri sides, and are the habitat of large numbers of wild elephant, bison, tiger, panther, sambar, spotted-deer and other animals. The forest-bungalow of Anaikutty is built on a knoll, past, which run the swirling waters of the Anaikutty river. In summer it

is an unhealthy place, full of malarial mosquito, and the origin of many fatal cases of 'black-water' fever. In the winter it is a paradise. The mornings are fresh and sunny, ideally suited to long hikes through the forest. The afternoons are moderately cool. The evenings chilly, while with nightfall an icy-cold wind descends from the mountaintops to take the place of the warmer air rising from the surrounding forests. The nights are then so in tensely cold that one is invariably confined to the bungalow itself, in all the rooms of which fireplaces have been provided. Here a truly Christmassy feeling prevails, before a blazing fire of forest logs, while the party discusses the latest stories of the 'abominable snow-man', or ghost stories are related in hair-raising detail. Even within the compound of this bungalow elephant and tiger and panther roam, their screams, roars and grunts reminding the sleepy in mate, snugly tucked below double-blankets, with the glow of a fire by his bedside that he is still in the midst of a tropical jungle.

These forests are a favorite resort of mine, and in them I have met with several little adventures that are still memorable after these many years. To relate just one. Wild-dogs, which hunt in packs in India, varying in numbers from three to thirty, sometimes invade these forests from over the boundaries of Mysore and Coimbatore, where they are very numerous, more so in the latter district. These packs are very destructive to all forms of deer, particularly sambar and spotted-deer, which they hunt down inexorably, and tear limb from limb while still alive. On several occasions, both in these and other jungles, I have come across sambar actually being chased by these dogs. The method adopted is that, while a few dogs chase the animal, others break away in a flanking movement, to run ahead of their quarry and ambush it as it dashes past them. When hunting, they emit a series of yelps in a very high pitch, resembling the whistling cry of a bird rather than that of a dog. The quarry is brought to earth after being attacked by these flankers, which bite out its eyes, disembowel it, hamstring or emasculate it, in their efforts to bring it down. I once saw a sambar pursued by wild-dogs, dash into a pool of water to try and protect itself. It had been disemboweled and trailed its intestines behind it for the distance of twenty feet. Sambars are extraordinarily hardy, and sometimes are literally eaten alive by these dogs, before being killed.

One evening, at about 5 o'clock, I was a mile from the bungalow, interesting myself in an unusual species of ground orchid that sprouted from the earth in a spray of tiny star-shaped flowers. Suddenly I heard a medley of sounds whose origin I could not, at first define. There were cries, yelps, and long-drawn bays, interspersed with grunts and Vhoofs' that puzzled me. Then I knew that the noise was that of wild dogs, which seemed to be attacking a pig or a bear. Grabbing my rifle,

I ran in the direction of the din. I may have covered a furlong, when around the corner dashed a tigress, encircled by half-a-dozen wild dogs.

Concealing myself behind the trunk of a tree, I watched the unusual scene. The dogs had spread themselves around the tigress, who was growling ferociously. Every now and again one would dash in from behind to bite her. She would then turn to attempt to rend asunder this puny aggressor, when a couple of others would rush in from another direction. In this way she was kept going continually, and I could see she was fast becoming spent.

All this time the dogs were making a tremendous noise, the reason for which I soon came to know, when, in a lull in the fray, I heard the whistling cry of the main pack, galloping to the assistance of their advance party. The tigress must have also heard the sound, for in sudden, renewed fury, she charged two of the dogs, one of which she caught a tremendous blow on its back with her paw, cracking its spine with the sharp report of a broken twig. The other just managed to leap out of danger. The tigress then followed up her momentary advantage by bounding away, to be immediately followed by the five remaining dogs. They were just out of sight when the main pack streamed by, in which I counted twenty-three dogs, as they galloped past me without the slightest interest in my presence. Soon the sounds of pursuit died away, and all that remained was the one dead dog.

During the affair I had been too interested, and too lost in admiration at the courage of the dogs, to fire at either the tigress or her attackers. Next morning I sent out scouts to try to discover the result of the incident. They returned about noon, bringing a few fragments of tiger-skin, to report that the dogs had finally cornered their exhausted quarry about five miles away and had literally torn the tigress to pieces. As far as they could gather, five dogs had been killed in the final battle, after which the victors had eaten the tigress, and even the greater portions of their own dead companions. Three distinct tribes of natives inhabit these areas. There are the Badagas, descendants of long-ago invaders from the state of Mysore, themselves fleeing from Mahommedan conquerors from the north. These Badagas have now become rich; they own lands, vast herds of cattle and semi wild buffaloes, with tremendously long, curved horns. Next come the Kesavas, the greatest in numbers but laziest in disposition, who work under the Badagas as herdsmen and tillers of the soil. Lastly, come the Karumbas, comparatively few in number, the original inhabitants of the land and now entirely jungle-men; they live on wild honey, roots, hunting and the trapping of small animals and birds. These Karumbas

make excellent trackers, and like the Sholagas of the Coimbatore District and Pujarees of Salem, are true children of nature, who are born and live in the forests till the day of their death. Having given the reader a little idea of the country in which the adventure took place, I shall lose no further time in telling the story of the 'Man-eater of Segur'.

This tiger was reported to have come originally from the jungles of the Silent Valley Forest Block in the District of Malabar-Wynaad, below the extreme opposite, or southwestern face, of the Blue Mountains. This area is infested with elephant, of which it holds the record for 'rogues', and with bison. As a rule it does not hold many tiger. A few human kills took place in the Silent Valley and then ceased entirely, to recommence at Gudalur, some twenty miles from Tippakadu, at Masinigudi, and finally in all the areas between Segur and Anaikutty. How and why the tiger came so far from its place of origin, encircling the greater portion of the Nilgiri Mountains in doing so, nobody knows.

It was midsummer and the tiger had been particularly active, killing at Segur and, within a week, at Anaikutty, when I arrived. The last victim had been a Kesava herdsman, tending his herd of semi-wild buffaloes some two miles from Anaikutty along the lower reaches of the river, as it wended its way towards the Moyar. In this instance, the man-eater had stalked and attacked the man, completely ignoring the surrounding grazing buffaloes. It had killed him, and was perhaps carrying him away, when the buffaloes had become aware of its presence.

These animals, as I have already stated, are only semi domesticated, and extremely dangerous to a stranger, especially if he happens to be dressed in the unusual mode to them of a European, when they frequently charge on sight. Seeing the tiger, they had evidently attacked him en masse, and succeeded in driving him off, leaving the dead man where he had been dropped. That night, neither buffaloes nor herdsman returned to the kraal, so early the next morning a search party set out to discover the reason for their absence. It did not take them long to find the dead herdsman, surrounded by his herd of placidly grazing buffaloes, which had effectively prevented the tiger from returning to its prey. An examination of the corpse, the pugmarks of the tiger, and the pursuing hooves of the charging buffaloes, revealed the sequence of happenings as I have related them.

The kill that had taken place a week earlier at Segur had been that of a woman, as she went down to the Segur River with her water-pot to fetch the daily supply of water for her family. In this case the tiger had succeeded in carrying off its victim, the only evidence of the occurrence being the mute testimony of the broken water-pot, the pugs

of the tiger in the soft mud that bordered the river, a few drops of blood, the torn saree, and a few strands of human hair that had become entangled in the bushes as the tiger made off with its prey.

I visited both localities and by careful measurement and examination of the pugs, which were very clear on the riverbank at Segur, determined that the tiger was a smallish-sized male of considerably less than adult age. Reports had it that the tiger very frequently traversed the ten miles of forest road between Segur and Anaikutty, his pugs being seen, along this track, especially in the vicinity of both places. As a preliminary, I therefore decided to sit up along this road at differently selected places, and without wearying the reader with details, put this plan into practice, spending thus a whole week, alternately in the vicinity of Segur and Anaikutty, without seeing any signs of the tiger.

The seventh night I spent on a tree a mile-and-a-half from Segur. Returning the next morning to the Anaikutty forest bungalow, where I had established my headquarters, I was informed that a Karumba, who had left the previous morning to gather wild honey from the combs of the giant rock bee that abound by the hundred in the region of a place called 'Honey Rock', about four miles from the lower foothills of the Nilgiris, had not yet returned.

Assembling a group of twenty persons as a search party, I accompanied them to this wild and densely wooded spot. Splitting the party into four groups of five men each, as protection against possible attack by the man-eater, we searched till noon, when one of the men discovered the body of the dead Karumba lying in a nala, and brought me the news. I went to the spot and found the man had been killed by being bitten through the throat. Beside him lay his empty kerosene-tin, in which he had been gathering honey, all of which had spilt on the ground to form a feast for a colony of black-ants, which covered the tin in a black mass.

Thinking at first that the tiger had killed him, and wondering why it had not devoured him in that quiet, secluded spot, we cast around for tracks, but soon discovered that the killer had been a female sloth bear, accompanied by its cub. The human-like imprints of the mother's feet, and the smaller impressions of the cub's, were clearly to be seen in the soft sand that formed the bed of the nala. Evidently the she-bear had been asleep with its cub, or perhaps about to cross the nala, when the Karumba, in his search for honey, had suddenly come upon it. The sloth bear has a very uncertain temperament at the best of times, being poor of sight and hearing, so that humans have often been able to approach them very closely before being discovered, when in the

fright and excitement of the moment, they will attack without any provocation. Undoubtedly this is what happened, when the she-bear, surprised, frightened and irritated, and in defense of her young which she fancied was in danger, had rushed at the Karumba, bitten him through the throat, severing his jugular, and then made off as fast as she could.

I did not wish to spend time in hunting a bear which, after all, had only killed in defense of its cub, and was for returning to the bungalow at Anaikutty, when the four Karumbas that were included in the party, urged me to track down and shoot the animal, which they felt would be a menace to them when they, in turn, came to the same place for honey. More to please them than because I had any heart in the venture, I therefore sent the rest of the party back and followed these four men on the trail of the she-bear.

The tracks led along the nullah and then joined a stream, down which Mrs. Bruin and her baby had ambled for some distance before breaking back into the jungle. Thence she had climbed upwards towards the many rocks and caves that gave them shelter, where hundreds of rock-bee hives hung from every conceivable rock-projection in long, black masses, sometimes attaining a length of over five feet, a width of a yard, and a thickness of over a foot. The ground we were now traversing was hard and stony, and to my unskilled eyes presented no trace of the bears' passing. But the Karumbas were seldom at fault, and their powers of tracking really worth witnessing during the long and tiring walk that followed. For more than two hours they led me up hill and down dale, and across deep valleys and stony ridges. An overturned rock or stone, a displaced leaf, or the slightest marks of scraping or digging, showed them where the bears had travelled. At last we approached the mouth of a cave, high up over a projecting rock from which hung twenty-three separate rock-bee hives. This cave they declared, was the home of the she-bear and her cub.

Standing ten yards from the entrance, and to one side, I instructed the men to hurl stones into the interior, which they did with unabated vigor for quite twenty minutes. But not a sound did we hear. Then the Karumbas made a torch of grasses, which we ignited and threw into the cave, but still nothing happened. Finally they made five similar torches. Lighting one of these, I followed the Karumba that carried it into the cave, while the remaining three Karumbas came behind us, carrying the four spare grass torches. The cave was comparatively small inside and was obviously empty, the occupant and her youngster having left at hearing our approach, if not before. But I was glad of this, because, as I have said, I had no quarrel with this animal, and would

have regretted having to shoot it and leave the baby an orphan.

We had lit our third torch, and were just about to leave, when one of the Karumbas came upon an interesting curiosity of the Indian forest, of which I had heard but never seen, and the existence of which I consequently never believed.

He found in a corner what the natives call 'bear's bread', or 'Karadi roti', as it is named in Tamil. This was a roughly circular mass, about ten inches across, an inch thick, and of a dirty blackish-yellow, sticky consistency. Female bears are reported to seek out the fruits of the 'Jak' tree, a large fruit with a rough, thorny exterior; wild 'Wood-apple' fruit, the size of large tennis balls and with hard shells; and pieces of honey-comb, including bees, comb and honey. Each of these ingredients is first eaten by the she-bear in turn, the whole being then vomited in the cave in a mass, which the she-bear allows to harden into a cake, as reserve food for her young.

Due possibly to its long hair, the bear is marvelously impervious to the stings of the rock-bee, which prove fatal to a human being if suffered in large numbers. It can climb trees and rocks with astounding ability in search of wild fruit and honeycombs. A cave, inhabited by a she-bear with her young, is reported to contain sometimes a dozen such cakes. In this case we had found only one, but in as much as I had never come across or seen one before, I was immensely interested. As evidence of the wholesomeness of this 'bread', the four Karumbas offered it to me for immediate consumption, but I declined with thanks. They then divided it equally between themselves, and ate it with evident gusto.

We were now sitting at the entrance of the cave. Whether the flames of the torch, the smoke, or the sound of human voices disturbed them, I do not know, but suddenly a few black objects buzzed around us, and as we sprang to our feet to make off, the rock-bees from the hive immediately above, grossly disturbed and angry, descended upon us in an avalanche.

It was every man for himself, and as I grabbed my rifle and sprinted down the hillside, the agile Karumbas out distanced me very quickly. What I lacked in speed I made up, however, by being clothed, the bees being able to register some twenty stings on my neck and hands and other exposed parts, as compared with about forty that I counted on each of the bare skins of the Karumbas, when we slowed up half-a-mile away. It was indeed a comical ending to a tragic but interesting morning, and we returned to Anaikutty a far wiser, but very sore and

smarting party. I set out at 8 p.m. that night, motoring slowly to Segur in my Studebaker, a Karumba acting as assistant by my side and flashing the beams of my 'sealed-beam' spotlight along the jungle on both sides. Meeting nothing, we continued for six miles along the northwestern road, past Mahvanhalla and Masinigudi, and finally the four miles to the forest chowki at Tippakadu. Here we allowed an hour to pass before returning, this time encountering, three miles from Tippakadu, a herd of bison along the roadside. These animals crashed away as the car approached closer. Between Masinigudi and Segur we met several spotted-deer, and just after taking the turn to Anaikutty a large bull elephant in the centre of the road, his tusks gleaming sharply white in the powerful beams of the spot light. A gentle toot of the horn sufficed to send him scurrying on his way, and finally we reached the Anaikutty bungalow without seeing a trace of the man-eater.

The following morning dawned bright and fine, and I set out with my Karumba guide across the forest towards the Moyar River, nine miles to the north. Again we encountered no trace of the tiger, but came across the pugs of an exceptionally large forest-panther as the land began to dip sharply to the basin of the Moyar. Judging by its tracks, it was indeed a big animal, approaching the size of a small tigress, and would have made a fine trophy, had I the time to pursue it. We returned to the bungalow in the late after noon, tired and somewhat disappointed, after our long and fruitless walk.

Again that night we motored to Tippakadu and back, encountering only a solitary sambar, when returning, at the river crossing before the Anaikutty forest bungalow. With dawn I undertook another hike with my Karumba, this time in a southeasterly direction and towards the Nilgiris. We found a dead cow-bison in the bush four miles away, an examination of the carcass revealing that the animal had died of rinderpest. The Forest Department had reported some two months earlier that this epidemic had spread from the cattle of the Badagas, whose herds it afflicted in a contagious and epidemic form, to the wild animals, especially bison, and here lay proof of the statement.

That afternoon a report came in from Mahvanhalla that the tiger had taken a woman near the bridge by which the main road to Tippakadu crosses the Mahvanhalla Stream before it joins the Segur River. Motoring to the spot I was shown the place where, the previous evening, the tiger, which had been lurking on the banks of the stream, had attacked the woman, who had been among the herdsmen watering the large number of mixed cattle and buffaloes kraaled at Mahvanhalla. Apparently nobody had actually witnessed the incident,

the woman having been a little apart from the rest of the party assembled near the bridge and hidden by the bend the little stream takes just before it passes under the road. She had screamed shrilly and silence had followed. The remaining grazers, five in numbers, had hastened to Mahvanhalla, gathered reinforcements in the form of six others, including the husband of the unfortunate woman, and returned to the spot to look for her. They had found the basket she had been carrying, and close by in the soft earth, the pugmarks of a tiger; then the whole party had returned to Mahvanhalla. At dawn the next day, the four men who now reported themselves had set forth by footpath to cover the ten miles to Anaikutty and report the incident to me, it having become known that I was in the area to shoot the tiger.

We went to the place where the woman had been attacked, and with the expert help of my Karumba tracker were soon able to pick up the trail of the tiger and its victim. Before following I dismissed the party from Mahvanhalla, together with the bereaved husband, who made me promise faithfully that I would bring back at least a few bones of his beloved spouse to satisfy the requirements of a cremation ceremony. Almost without faltering, my Karumba guide followed what was to me the completely invisible trail left by the tiger. The man-eater was evidently making towards a high hill, an out-spur of the Nilgiri Range, that ran parallel to the road on the west at a distance of about two miles. Years ago I had partly climbed this very hill in search of a good bison head, and knew its middle slopes were covered with a sea of long spear grass, which gradually thinned out as the higher and more rocky levels were reached. In that area, I felt we had little chance of finding the tiger or its prey.

Nevertheless my stout little guide continued faultlessly, and within a mile of the foot of the hill came across the woman's saree, caught in the undergrowth. Shortly afterwards the tiger appeared to have changed its mind, in that its trail veered off to the right, parallel to the hill, which now was quite near, and back again towards the bed of the Mahvanhalla Stream. Still following, we eventually reached the stream, which here ran through a deep valley. Scattered bamboo-clumps grew in increasing numbers down this declivity, and the shrill squeal of vultures and the heavy flapping of their wings soon heralded the close of our search. The remains of the woman lay below a clump of bamboo, eaten by the tiger, and the vultures had finished what had been left over from his feast. We found the head lying apart, the eyes picked out of their sockets by the great birds, which had also devoured most of the flesh from the face. This ghastly remnant, together with her hands and feet, her glass bangles and silver anklets, we gathered to gather and wrapped in grass, and in fulfillment of my promise, the

Karumba very reluctantly carried the bundle to her husband. Sitting up at the spot seemed a waste of time, as the tiger would not return to such scattered remnants.

That night I continued my hunting by car but without success, and next day procured a young buffalo, which I tied close to the bend in the stream at Mahvanhalla, where the woman had been attacked. The chances of the tiger visiting the same spot being remote, I decided not to sit up over the live buffalo, but to await a kill, should it occur. In this surmise I was wrong, for before noon next day runners came to Anaikutty to report that the buffalo had been killed and partly eaten by a tiger. By 3 p.m. my machan was fixed, and I sat overlooking the dead bait, at a height of some fifteen feet.

A large red-martin, a big species of mongoose that in habits the lower slopes of the Nilgiris, was the first visitor to put in an appearance at the kill. He came at about 5.30 p.m., at first nibbled cautiously, and then began to gobble chunks of the raw meat. By 6 o'clock he had filled himself to bursting-point, and made off to pass the night in dreamless contentment, or with a heavy attack of indigestion. As dusk fell the shadowy forms of three jackals slunk forward. With the greatest temerity they approached the dead animal, sniffed it while glancing around apprehensively, and made off in frightened rushes, only to return each time, as hunger and the demands of a voracious appetite urged them on. At about the fourth attempt they finally settled down to eat, but had hardly taken a few mouthfuls when there was a rush and a scamper and they were gone. This was surely the coming of the tiger, I thought, and sure enough a slinking, grey shape flitted into the open and cautiously shambled up to the kill. No tiger would so shamefacedly approach his own kill, however, and the hyena for hyena it was began all over again the cautious and frightened approaches of his smaller cousins, the jackals. Several times he sniffed at the meat, the while he glanced furtively to right and left. Several times he shambled away, to scurry around in a wide circle and see if the coast was clear, before cautiously slinking up again to take a hasty mouthful. Then off he went in another wide circle to make sure that the rightful owner of the kill was not in the vicinity to catch him red-handed. This continued for quite half-an-hour, before the hyena settled down to a serious meal.

He had been eating for ten minutes when a tiger called nearby. 'A-oongh, Aungh-ha, Ugha-ugh, 0-o-o-n-o-o-n', was four times repeated in the silent night air, and the hyena whisked away as if by magic and did not return. I sat in readiness, momentarily expecting the appearance of the king of the jungle. But the hours dragged on and he did not come. Whatever may have been the reason that tiger gave the

kill a wide berth that night, and the false dawn found me shivering with the intense cold that had now set in despite the summer season. I remained till day light to descend from my machan, cramped and stiff, thoroughly disgusted and disappointed with the world at large and with the tiger in particular. What caused him to approach so close to his kill that night without actually putting in an appearance will ever remain a mystery.

I rested the next day and followed my usual nightly procedure of motoring along the road to Tippakadu and back, but without seeing any sign of the tiger. This time a small panther jumped off a roadside culvert exactly at the turning point on the road to Anaikutty, and crouched in the ditch, its bright eyes gazing into the spotlight as the car passed by. I let the little brute alone, to pass its days in happiness in the beautiful forests where it rightly belonged. The next week proved uneventful, and I began to think of giving up the chase and returning to Bangalore, but eventually I decided to wait three more days before departing. One of these three days passed uneventfully, when, at midday the second day, a Badaga boy, the son of a rich cattle-owner at Segur, was carried away by the tiger while taking the midday meal to his father, who was with the cattle, and other Kesava herdsmen. I was soon at the spot with my Karumbas, to follow up the trail. The tiger had carried the boy across the Segur River and into the jungle to the north. Again we followed, without delay, and this time found the body hidden in a nala and only half-eaten. Unfortunately, the father arrived at the scene, and wanted to remove the body, and an hour was lost in argument to persuade him to let it remain and give me a chance of sitting up.

In the vicinity of the body there was no suitable tree or rock in which to conceal myself, and eventually it was decided to move the corpse some fifty feet towards a bamboo clump, on the top of which an unstable machan was erected. To reach this, I had to climb up the notches of a cut bamboo stem, only to find the machan one of the worst I had ever sat on in my life. It swayed alarmingly with every current of wind, and my slightest movement caused the bamboos to creak ominously below me. Besides, I did not have a good view of the body, which was over thirty yards away. The bamboo stems growing around me completely obstructed any view at a close range. The beginning of my vigil was most uninteresting, and no living thing put in an appearance beyond a peacock, which alighted higher up the nullah bank from the place where the corpse was lying. From there it walked slowly downwards, till it suddenly caught sight of the prone, human form in the nullah where we had left it, when with a great flapping of wings it sailed away above my head, its flowing tail glinting a greenish-

red in the rays of the setting sun, for all the world like a comet flapping through the forest.

At 9 p.m. I became aware of the presence of the tiger by the low moan he emitted from near the spot where he had originally left the corpse. I cursed myself for having shifted it, but realized that this had had to be done, as there was absolutely no shelter for me at that spot. Finding his kill had been moved, the tiger then growled several times. After all, we had shifted it a bare fifty feet, and from where he stood the tiger would undoubtedly see it in its new position and come towards it; or so I hoped. But moving the kill had been fatal, raising within the tiger a deep suspicion as to why the man it had left dead, and had partly eaten, had now moved away.

It is extraordinary how very cautious every man-eater becomes by practice, whether a tiger or a panther, and cowardly too. Invariably, it will only attack a solitary person, and that, too, after prolonged and painstaking stalking, having assured itself that no other human being is in the immediate vicinity. I believe there is hardly any case on record where a man-eater has attacked a group of people, while many instances exist where timely interference, or aid by a determined friend or relative, has caused a man-eater to leave his victim and flee in absolute terror. These animals seem also to possess an astute sixth sense and be able to differentiate between an unarmed human being and an armed man deliberately pursuing them, for in most cases, only when cornered will they venture to attack the latter, while they go out of their way to stalk and attack the unarmed man.

This particular tiger was definitely possessed of a very acute sixth sense, for it guessed something was amiss. Instead of openly approaching its kill, as I had hoped it would, it then began to circle the whole area, plaintively moaning at intervals, as if in just complaint against the meanness of fate at having moved the kill. Around and around it travelled for quite an hour, till it finally decided that the kill was forbidden fruit, and the last I heard was its plaintive moaning receding to southwards, as it made for the sheltering hills.

This last episode, with its attendant failure, caused me to redouble my determination to bag this most astute animal, and to postpone my departure, if need be, for another fortnight, to enable me to do so. Gossip with the Karumbas now suggested that the tiger might be met at nights along the many cart tracks that branched into the forest from Anaikutty, Segur and Mahvanhalla, rather than along the main roads on which I had been motoring for several nights. As these cart tracks were unmotorable, I hired a bullock cart for the next week, and

determined to spend each night in it meandering along every possible track in the vicinity of the three places. The driver of this cart, a Kesava, was an unusually doughty fellow, and my two Karumba scouts were to accompany me to suggest the most likely tracks.

The next three nights we spent in this fashion, encountering only sambar and spotted-deer, and on the third night, an elephant, which gave us some anxious moments. It was where the track crossed the Anaikutty River, two miles from the village, that we first met him. He had been standing under a mighty 'Muthee' tree, as motionless as a rock, and quite unnoticed by us. In the cart we carried the car battery, which I had detached together with the 'sealed beam' spotlight, to be used in emergency only. For ordinary illumination, and for picking up eyes in the jungle, we were using two torches, a seven-cell and a five-cell respectively.

As I was saying, we were crossing the river, and the cart was about midway in the stream, the bulls struggling valiantly to pull the huge wheels through the soft sand, when the elephant, alarmed and annoyed by the torches, let forth a piercing scream, like the last trump of doom, and came splashing at us through the water. Switching on the 'sealed-beam', I caught him in its brilliant rays about thirty yards away. The bright beam brought him to a halt, when he commenced stamping his feet in the water and swinging his great bulk and trunk from side to side, undecided whether to charge or to make off. We then shouted in unison, and focused all lights on him, and with a parting scream of rage he swirled around and shuffled off into the black forest, a very angry and indignant elephant indeed.

We continued these bullock-can prowls for the next three nights, but without success. On the morning of the seventh day, the tiger killed the son of the Forest Guard stationed at Anaikutty, a lad aged eighteen years. At 9 a.m., and in bright sunlight, he had left his hut in the village and gone a short distance up the path leading to the river and to the bungalow where I lay sleeping after my nights in the cart. He had gone to call his dog, which was in the habit of wandering between the village and the bungalow, less than a mile away, because of some scraps, which I daily gave it after each meal. That boy was never seen alive again. His father, the Forest Guard, thinking he was with me at the bungalow, took his absence for granted. When noon came, and it was time for the midday meal, the youth had not yet appeared and the Guard decided to come to the bungalow and fetch him. By the roadside, within a furlong of the river, he came across his son's cap. This alarmed him, and he called aloud to the boy. Receiving no answer, he ran the remaining distance to the bungalow and awoke me,

to tell me what he had found.

Feeling something had befallen the lad, I picked up the rifle and accompanied the anxious father to the spot where the cap was still lying. Looking around, we found his slipper under a bush ten yards away and realized that the worst had happened. Remaining at the spot, I told the now weeping guard to hurry back to the village and summon the Karumba trackers. Within a quarter-hour these men had joined me and we

started on the trail. The boy appeared to have struggled and had probably cried aloud, although none had been there to hear him, for within a few yards of where we found the slipper, the tiger had apparently laid him down and bitten him savagely. This was made clear by the sudden spurts of blood that smeared the dried grass for the area of quite a square yard. The tiger had then proceeded with its prey, leaving a trail of blood on the ground, which gradually petered out as the blood began to coagulate.

The river here turned north-west and we found that the tiger was making in its direction. Pressing forward, we soon reached the thick jungle that clothed the river-banks, where the blood-trail once again became evident in the occasional red smear that marked the leaves of the under growth as the tiger, holding its prey in its mouth, had pushed through.

In the soft mud of the riverbank we saw the fresh pugmarks of the killer, which passed across the shallow water to the opposite bank. Here it led up the slope to the shelter of a clump of jungle-plum bushes, before which we found the lad's remains. He had been almost half-devoured and was a ghastly sight. The reason for the sudden spurts of blood on the trail we had followed now became apparent.

The boy had obviously been still alive when carried off by the tiger, as we had already surmised, and must have screamed and struggled in an effort to get free. Annoyed, the tiger had thrown him down and dealt the boy a smashing blow across the skull with its forepaw. The forehead had been crushed inwards, like a squashed eggshell, while the sharp talons had half-torn the scalp away, leaving the bare bone of the skull exposed to view. One of the eyes had also been gouged out by a claw, and hung from its socket.

The grief of that poor father was truly heart-rending to watch, as he prostrated himself at the feet of his only son, kissed the poor mangled remains, and called aloud to heaven and earth for vengeance, while heaping dust, that he scratched from the dry ground, on to his own

head. Shaking him roughly to bring him to his senses, and telling him earnestly that the more noise he made and the more time he wasted correspondingly lessened our chances of shooting the tiger, we succeeded in reducing his cries to a whimper.

A medium-sized 'Jumlum' tree overshadowed the plum bush beneath which the boy lay, and on this tree I determined to erect my machan. I sent the father and the two Karumbas back to the bungalow, instructing the latter to bring my portable 'charpoy' machan, and pending their return climbed up into the 'Jumlum' tree, both for my own protection, and to get a shot if the tiger should suddenly put in an appearance.

The two Karumbas were back in under an hour with the machan, which they securely and efficiently tied in the lower branches of the 'Jumlum' tree at the usual height of

a little over fifteen feet. They had also brought my water bottle, gun-torch and blanket, as instructed, and soon after noon I climbed into the machan in high hopes of securing a shot.

Evening came, and nightfall, without a sign of the tiger. Then followed a sudden rainstorm, such as sometimes occurs in the midst of a dry summer in India. Lightning flashes illuminated the forest as bright as day, vividly revealing the corpse beneath the plum-tree below; thunder crashed, reverberating against the adjacent hills; and the rain literally descended in torrents, preceded by a sharp shower of hailstones.

Within a minute I was soaked to the skin, and as the downpour continued, before my very eyes the river rose with the mass of water that rushed down from the surrounding hills, till I judged it to be unfordable. This dreadful state of affairs continued till well past midnight, when the rain died down to a thin, cold drizzle. Then a horribly chill wind set in, blowing down from the Nilgiris to the sodden forest. The drizzle finally ceased, the wind continued and, as evaporation began in my soaking clothes and blankets, the cold became intense and unbearable.

Gladly would I have faced a dozen man-eaters and returned to the bungalow, but this was impossible owing to the swollen river, which still remained unfordable. The waters swirled by, carrying with them uprooted tree trunks, stripped branches, and debris of all kinds, including dead logs that had been lying for years along the riverbank. To attempt a crossing of that raging torrent, in pitch darkness, would have been to invite death by drowning, if not by a blow across the head from a racing tree-trunk. To add to my difficulties, the acute cold,

the exposure, the lack of proper sleep and my now generally exhausted condition, brought on a sharp attack of malaria. The onset of the attack was in the usual form of ague, which caused my teeth to chatter like castanets, followed within an hour by high fever to the verge of delirium. I lost all interest in shooting the tiger, and how I passed the remainder of that never-to-be-forgotten night without falling off the machan, I shall never know. It was past 8 o'clock next morning before my Karumbas returned, to find me almost unconscious and still in a high fever. Somehow they got me across the river and to the bungalow, where I spent the next forty-eight hours in bed in the grip of successive attacks of malarial chills and fever, which only abated on the third day with the assiduous use of paludrine.

How I did not contract pneumonia as an after-effect of

this terrible experience is a question to which only Providence knows the answer. On the third day, when I began to take a little more interest in life, my men told me that the tiger had returned, either during or after the raging storm, and removed its victim while I was huddled, so ill, in the tree above it. This gave me an added reason for gratitude to Providence, for had I fallen off that tree in delirium, I might easily have become a fresh victim. I took it easy for the next two days to give myself a chance of recovering completely from my bout of fever, and also to await news of a fresh kill, which was bound to occur, sooner or later. The third day I spent in procuring three buffalo baits, tying one each at Anaikutty, Segur and Mahvanhalla. They were all alive the following morning, so on the next day I resumed my peregrinations, roaming the forest around Anaikutty in the morning in the hope of Meeting the tiger accidentally, and driving by car to Tippakadu and back by night.

Two days later, the run of bad luck I had been experiencing over the past three weeks suddenly changed for the better. That morning, for a change, I decided to follow the course of the Segur River for some miles downstream; driving with my Karumbas to Segur village, I left the car at a large banana plantation and began to put this plan into effect. Hardly a mile downstream is a swampy area, much in habited by bison in years gone by, and still locally known as 'Bison Swamp'. A half-mile beyond this, a large patch of dense bamboo jungle covers both banks of the stream. These bamboos have always been a favorite haunt of elephant and sambar, tiger occasionally passing through on their way down from the hills.

It was 8.30 a.m., and we had just entered the bamboos, when a sambar doe belled loudly from the opposite bank, to be taken up

almost immediately by the hoarser cry of a stag. The Karumbas and I sank to the ground among the rushes that grew profusely along the river edge at this spot. The two sambars repeated their calls in quick succession, and it was obvious that something had alarmed them. At first I thought they had seen or winded us, but I dismissed the idea with the realization that what breeze existed was blowing upstream, from the sambar to us. Also, they could not have spotted us, being, as they were, some distance within the bamboos, from where we were quite out of sight. Our progress had been very silent and cautious, so the only conclusion to be drawn from the continued strident calls of the sambar was that they had seen or winded a tiger or panther, as no other human beings would be about in such a lonely place, due to the panic created by the man-eater.

We lay in the rushes for almost ten minutes when, with a loud clatter over the loose stones in the riverbed, a sambar stag, closely followed by a doe, dashed across, to disappear among the bamboos on the same bank as that on which we were hiding. Not a move came from any of us as the anxious moments passed and then, silently, gracefully and boldly, a tiger stepped out of cover from the opposite bamboos and glided down the steeply declining bank to the river's edge. With out hesitation he walked into the river, ignored the cobbled stones, and when the water had reached his chest, he stopped and commenced lapping.

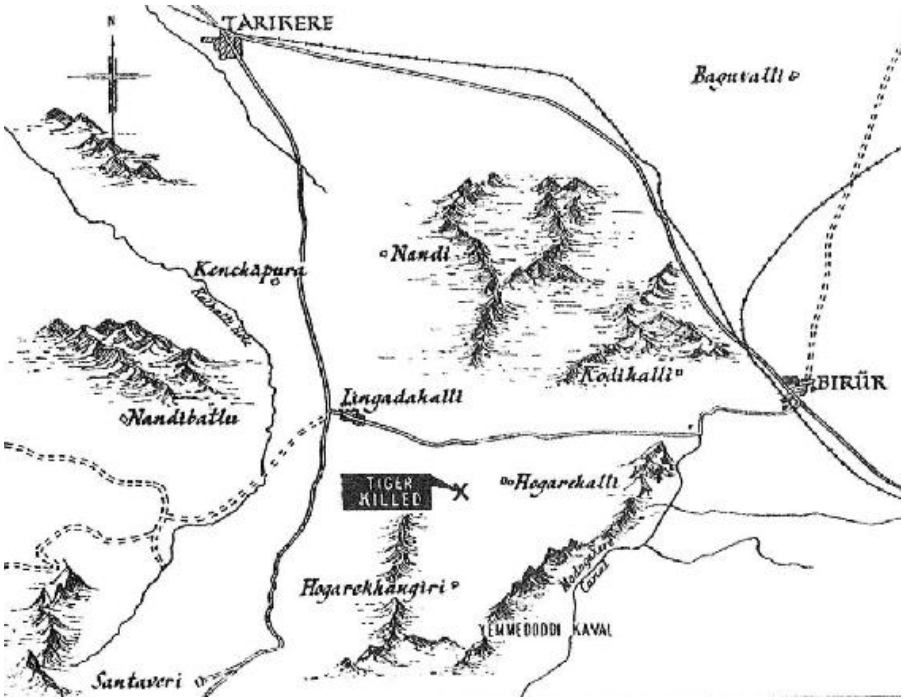
Taking careful aim, I fired behind his left shoulder. He sprang backwards, emitting a coughing-grunt, and then rolled over on his side, facing away from me and towards the bank from which he had just come. Running forwards out of concealment, I advanced some forty yards, from where I could just see a part of the side of his face, the rest having sunk below the water. Here I waited quite fifteen minutes, to put in another shot if need be, but it proved unnecessary, for the tiger was dead.

I have mentioned that I had taken careful measurements of the man-eater's pugs, which I compared with those of the specimen now before me, to find they corresponded exactly. Thus I knew that at last, after many tiring efforts and exasperating failures, I had shot the man-eater of Segur.

The reason for his man-eating propensity also became apparent, in that the animal had only one eye. The remaining eyeball had shrunk to nothing. When skinning this tiger I took particular trouble to investigate the cause of the loss of that eye, and upon digging out what remained of the organ with a knife, I found a gunshot slug embedded in the

socket. Here was clear reason why the animal had become a man-eater. Someone, in all probability a poacher armed with a muzzle-loader, had fired at the animal's face, in the far-away Silent Valley of the Malabar-Wynaad. A slug had entered the eye and blinded him. Desperate, in pain, and hampered by the loss of his eye, the tiger had found it difficult to hunt his normal prey, and so had taken his revenge upon the species that had been responsible for the loss of his eye.

The Man-Eater of Yemmaydoddi



YEMMAYDODDI is an area of forest in the Kadur District of Mysore in Southern India. It is bordered by a ridge of foothills, the highest of which is named Hogar Khan that form the eastern spurs of the great mountain range known as the Baba Budans, which reach a height of 6,500 feet. A magnificent lake, called the 'Madak', entirely surrounded by forest-clad hills, forms the southern limit of this area, from which a narrow water-channel, paralleled by an equally narrow forest road, runs for ten miles north-east wards, till the former joins a smaller lake about three miles north of the little town of Birur.

This area is rich in game, and still richer in vast herds of cattle that are driven into the forest by day to graze, and driven back each evening to Birur. Small wonder it is, then, that the surroundings abound with tiger, that come there in the first instance as game killers, to feed on the plentiful sambar, spotted-deer and wild pig, but sooner or later become cattle-lifters, because the cattle are so much easier to kill and because of the complete complacency and indifference with which the local herdsmen look after their charges. It is no exaggeration to say that hardly a day passes without the loss of a fine cow or bull in the jaws of

a tiger, while the panther's destruction of calves, goats and village dogs on the outskirts of Birur is almost as common. Actually, these smaller carnivores are fewer in number than their bigger cousins, and confine themselves to the outskirts of the town itself, well out of the tiger area, because of their fear of the larger animal to whom they themselves sometimes fall prey.

Early in 1946 a small male tiger appeared in this locality with habits distinctly its own. It began with minor killings of calves and goats, snatched in the evenings from returning herds, near the outskirts of Birur, and its depredations were at first taken for those of a panther, except for the characteristic breaking of the neck in the case of the larger calves. This method of killing is almost exclusively followed by tiger, and sometimes by the larger species of forest panther, known as 'Thendu' in Hindustani, so that there was appreciable cause for mistake in identifying the marauder as one of the latter, till on one occasion a frightened herdsman actually witnessed the killing of a young cow, where after the question was no longer in doubt.

This young animal rapidly grew to adulthood in the area, miraculously escaping the shots of various shikarees, both indigenous and foreign, and grew in cunning and daring too, till in eighteen months it became a major menace to the cattle-grazers, killing twice, and occasionally thrice a week, and invariably selecting a particularly fine specimen on each occasion.

Towards the end of 1948, I accompanied a party of friends to Yemmaydoddi, with the object of procuring a trophy for one of them, Alfie Robertson, who was shortly due to return to England. I had received news of the tiger on several occasions and felt sure it would be a fairly easy matter for my companion to bag the animal, provided we camped at Birur a few days till receiving news of a kill. We motored from Bangalore, the distance being 134 miles. Unfortunately I was detained at my office and we left late in the evening. The roads were execrable, and we met with an accident near a place called Tiptur, 86 miles from Bangalore. We were using my friend's car and he was driving. The rear wheel went over a deceptively flat stone, which stood up on its edge when the wheel passed over one end of it, the other cutting a nine-inch slit in the petrol tank, which was at the rear of the car. Eight gallons of gasoline thereupon poured on to the road, and the vehicle came to a stop.

We had no spare petrol, but were carrying a Primus Stove, for which we had brought two bottles of paraffin oil. Passing one end of the rubber lead of the foot pump into a bottle of paraffin, we contrived to fit

the remaining end on to the pipe leading into the carburetor after having first started a siphon-feed. Thus we managed to cover the short remaining distance to Tiptur. Here we awoke the only tinker in town, unbuckled the fuel tank and managed to patch up the rent with the side of a paraffin tin which I found outside some sleeping inhabitant's house.

Next came the major problem of fuel for the onward journey. We pushed the car to the one petrol station in the town, only to be informed that the supply of gas had been exhausted the previous day and would not be replenished till noon the next day, at the earliest. It seemed that we were doomed to a prolonged halt at Tiptur. There were one or two lorries in the town. We awoke the sleeping drivers and offered them fabulous prices for just one gallon of petrol to carry us the sixteen miles to the next town of Arsikere, where was a Burma Shell petrol pump at which we were bound to be able to get a fresh supply. But one and all pleaded they themselves had run out of fuel, and were awaiting the expected fresh stock at noon next day. The situation was disheartening, till I decided on adopting desperate measures. It was about 3.30 a.m., and scruples and conscience, like the town of Tiptur, had long since fallen asleep. Calling to Alfie to bring the paraffin tin, from which we had cut the patch for our fuel tank, and carrying the rubber-lead of the foot-pump myself, we commenced a stealthy stalk through the silent streets of Tiptur.

In a lane we spotted a battered 'A' Model Ford. Instructing Alfie to keep careful watch against the owner awakening. I crept forward on the offside of the vehicle. Reaching the bonnet, I removed the fuel-tank cover behind the engine, slipped one end of the rubber tube into the tank, and siphoned a little over a quart of the precious fuel into the tin, which I balanced between my knees. A second trip procured us another quart. Mixing the fuel with the remaining bottle of paraffin oil, we made off hastily to Arsikere, where we obtained a fresh supply.

As a result, we did not arrive at our destination, the small town of Birur, until about 7.30 in the morning. We passed through the town and had gone about two miles to wards the forest, when we came upon an open field in which a number of vultures were crowded. My friend took a photograph, while I got down to investigate the cause of this assembly, and was agreeably surprised to find a half-grown bullock, killed by a panther, right up against the hedge that bordered the road we had just traversed. There was no doubt that the kill had been made by a panther, as the fang marks on the throat of the dead animal showed where it had been strangled. The vertebrae of the neck were intact and had not been broken, which would have been the case had

the killer been a tiger. Besides, the under portion of the animal had been eaten, while the en trails were still inside the carcass, conclusively proving a panther to have been the miscreant. For a tiger is a clean feeder, and before beginning a meal makes an opening in the rear portion of its kill, through which it removes the entrails and stomach to a distance of ten feet, so that its meal shall not be polluted with excreta.

We were highly delighted at this early stroke of luck, and after protecting the kill from the vultures with branches broken at a distance from the hedge, I constructed a hide in the hedge itself, overlooking the kill at pointblank range. We made a good job of this construction, and Alfie felt himself more than compensated for the trouble we had experienced with his car the night before, in the certainty of bagging the panther when it returned to its kill late that evening.

We then moved on some distance, ate, and slept in preparation for the night's adventure. By 5 p.m., we re turned to the kill and our hideout, removing the covering which had effectively kept the vultures from the dead animal. Alfie then sat himself inside the hide, complete with rifle, torch, blanket and water-bottle, and I was in the act of driving back to Birur in the car, when a breathless herdsman ran up to inform us that one of his large milch cows had just been killed by a tiger, hardly half-an-hour earlier and not a mile away. I gave the decision to Alfie. Would he prefer a panther as a certainty, or a tiger as a chance? In keeping with what would have been my own decision, he chose to make an attempt on the tiger. We accordingly bundled the paraphernalia out of the hide and into the car, drove swiftly up the road for half-a-mile till the herdsman told us to stop, brought the things out again, and then hastened after him into the forest and to the kill.

We did not have far to walk, and within three furlongs came upon the dead animal, a fine black milking cow. The neck had been distinctly broken and bubbles of froth were still coming from the nose. But the tiger had not eaten a morsel, evidently having been disturbed by the herdsman, or perhaps by the buffaloes, which had been grazing along with the cattle. It was now 6 p.m. and was rapidly growing dark. Unfortunately, there was no tree at this spot, and a few minutes' search made it evident we would have either to abandon the kill or risk a ground shot at the tiger when it returned. Alfie was too keen even to hear of abandoning the kill, so with the help of the herdsman I broke a few branches from adjoining bushes, and made a very rough hide, into which we all clambered shortly after 6.30 p.m. It was almost dark by now, and within fifteen minutes the outline of the dead cow, twenty-five yards away, faded into obscurity. Although moonless, the stars

diffused sufficient light to enable us to see in the immediate vicinity, but the kill itself was just out of range. An hour passed, and then about half-a-mile away I heard the weird cry of the solitary jackal. Much has been written and many theories propounded about this strange phenomenon of the forests the lone jackal. Jackals usually wander in packs near the outskirts of towns and villages, the precincts of which they enter at night in search of offal. Their chorus cry, headed by a leader, is distinctive, familiar to the people of India, and sounds something like : 'Ooooooh! Ooo-where? Ooowhere? Ooo-where-where-where ? Here! Here! Here! Here! Here! Heee-re! Heeee-re! Heee-jah ! Heee-yah \ Heee-ee-ee-yah ! Here-Here-Here- Here-Heeeee-yah. yah ! yah \ yah !'

The lone jackal, however, although a jackal of the same species in every sense of the word, adopts a very different call. His solitary, long-drawn, "Ba-Ioo-ah \ Baa-oooo-ah' had earned him a reputation, coupled with endless superstitions, fables and jungle-lore. But from this maze of conjecture two theories stand out. The first is that this jackal accompanies a tiger or panther, generally the former, which it leads to a kill by its weird cry, claiming as its share of the strange partnership a bite at the remains after the rightful owner has gorged its fill. The second theory is that the lone jackal attaches itself to a particular carnivore, which it follows at a very safe distance, most tenaciously, in order to make certain of regular meals at what is left over from kills every time his patron feeds. Whichever of the two theories is correct, the presence and cry of a lone jackal is a certain indication of the proximity of a tiger or panther, a fact of which I have had personal corroboration in many forest areas of India.

Therefore, the cry of the lone jackal told us that night, in as definite a way as if we had seen the tiger itself that the cattle-slayer was approaching. About ten minutes elapsed and then we heard a distinct 'Ugha-ughl Ughl' in the direction of, and beyond, the kill. The tiger had arrived! Softly I nudged Alfie's leg, but he was all attention. Time passed, and we heard a slight crackle in the scrub followed by a faint thud and dragging sound. Alfie depressed the torch switch and a bright beam of light flared out. Unfortunately, with the uncertain background, he misjudged the spot where the kill was lying, and shone a little too far to the left. The warning was enough for the tiger, and with a guttural 'Wrr-oof ! Wrroof !' it sprang back into the shelter of the undergrowth. We remained an hour longer, but I knew it was time wasted, and that the tiger would not return. At the end of this time we heard a faint 'A-oongh\ Aungh-hal O-o-on-o-o-n!' as the tiger crossed a ridge over a mile away, leaving us to ourselves.

Ruefully we packed up and returned to the car, only to find that Alfie had mislaid the switch-key. While searching, the night bus, carrying passengers from the town of Lingadhalli to Birur, passed us. Then Alfie found the key, and we followed in the wake of the bus. Arriving at the spot where we had constructed our hide out for the panther, we were surprised to see, reflected in the glow of the headlights of the bus before us, the eyes of the leopard, which had now returned and was devouring its kill. At the same time the driver of the bus saw the eyes, and brought the ponderous vehicle to a halt with a screech of brakes, and a cloud of suffocating dust, which enveloped us behind.

Alfie and I got down, walked abreast of the bus and located the panther sneaking away half-across the intervening field. He fired and the animal sprang into the air with a sharp 'Arrr-aarh !' and then streaked across the field like greased lightning.

Too late we realized that we had done the wrong thing. Alfie should have got back again in our hide-out and I should have driven away in the wake of the bus. The leopard would undoubtedly have returned to its kill within minutes of the departure of the two vehicles, and given Alfie an easy shot. As matters stood, I had not counseled correctly, and we had now a wounded leopard on our hands. But it was no use crying over spilt milk, so we returned to Birur, to spend the night at the Travelers' Bungalow.

Next morning found us back at the spot, and after casting around I found a faint blood-trail, which began to make itself evident only at the extreme end of the field, increasing as we entered the dense undergrowth. Here we were confronted with a tough proposition. The leopard had evidently been hit in the flank, and it had taken time for the blood to flow down the animal's side and drip to the ground, which is why it only appeared as a blood-trail at the end of the field. Thereafter it had dripped freely, while the animal had crawled into the densest undergrowth, consisting of lantana and 'wait-a-bit' shrubs, where it was impossible to follow except on hands and knees. A timeworn wild pig trail led through this undergrowth, and the leopard had passed along it, as was evident by the copious blood-trail he left.

On hands and knees, and pushing my cocked .405 Winchester before me as I progressed, I crawled in the wake of the wounded beast with Alfie bringing up the rear, as a safeguard against a flank attack, or one from behind. We had progressed about seventy-five yards in this fashion when, without warning, the leopard, which had been lying up at the next bend in the trail, saw fit to launch his attack.

There was hardly room for a miss, and I hit him almost at muzzle-length, the soft-nosed bullet smashing his skull and completely removing the rear segment of the brainpan. He died in front of me, the fluid from his brain oozing from his shattered skull.

We remained at Birur a full ten days, but in all this time only one further kill occurred, and that on the forenoon of the seventh day at a place six miles down the Yemmaydoddi channel. By the time that word of the incident was brought us and we arrived at the spot, it was late evening and we found that vultures had completely demolished the kill, no precaution having been taken to hide it with leaves. A tree overlooked the remains at about forty yards distance, and Alfie sat in a crotch till midnight, but the tiger did not put in an appearance.

Thereafter nothing happened, as I have said, and on the morning of the eleventh day we left for Bangalore. Time passed. Then one dark night along the road from Lingadhalli to Birur motored a quartette of 'Car-shikaris' people who shoot from their car with the aid of spotlights, never so much as setting foot to the ground when passing through the forests. Of tracking, the science of big-game shooting, and the beauties of the jungle and Mother Nature, they know nothing and care less. For them, the highest form of sport lies in casting intense beams of light from their sealed-beam spotlights into the bordering forest and discharging a volley of rifle and gunshots at whatever eyes might catch and reflect the brilliance of their sealed beams.

As to what animal they fire at, male, female or young, they do not care, for they are filled only with the lust to kill or wound. Needless to say, such activities are against all existing regulations, but they often take place nevertheless. And so it transpired that, when about four miles from Birur, they picked up the large fiery-white eyes of a tiger as it crested a bank that bordered the road. Two shots rang out and the tiger sprang away, its lower jaw smashed at the extremity by a rifle bullet, while the other shot had gone wide. Needless to say the 'car shikaris' did not stop to investigate, nor did they return next morning to trail the wounded beast and put it out of its misery. They merely went on their way, seeking for other eyes at which to fire.

The wounded tiger must have suffered intense agony for the next two months, nor could it eat properly. Being unable to maintain a death-grip on its prey with a badly healed broken lower-jaw, it was unable to procure its usual food in the form of game or cattle. One day, about three months later, it attempted to secure a goat from a herd that had been driven to graze in the forest. With infinite caution, it stalked the herd and had just sprung upon a fat nanny to kill her with a powerful

blow from its paws instead of the usual neck-breaking process with the jaw, when the audacious herdsman, standing close by, flung his staff. The chance aim proved true in this instance, and the staff caught the tiger a flanking blow. Enraged, it charged the herdsman, the paw-blow substitute again proving eminently successful in almost completely scalping the unfortunate man while still alive. His scream of terror and agony was cut short by another powerful blow of the forepaw, which this time crushed the man's skull as if it had been an egg.

The man collapsed, leaving the tiger the choice of two victims to eat, the goat or a human being. It hesitated over the carcass of the latter, and licked the blood that oozed from the smashed skull As if to make a fair comparison it then went across to the nanny, which it seized by the neck and after a moment began to carry away into the jungle thickets. But within a few paces, and for no accountable reason, it stopped, dropped the nanny, walked across to the dead herdsman, and seizing him by a shoulder, disappeared into the all-concealing fastnesses of the surrounding forest.

The dreaded man-eater of Yemmaydoddi was thus created, and his reign of stark terror had commenced. Thereafter, deaths attributable to this beast occurred within an area of about 250 square miles, ranging from Birur, Lingadhalli and up to Bhagavadkatte on the north, across to Santaveri on the Baba Budan Mountains on the west, and southwards past the Ironkere Lake to Sakrepatna and back to Birur. While human kills followed each other with alarmingly increasing regularity, they were spaced along a definite beat and had the distinctive mark that every victim had been killed by a powerful blow of the paw and not by die usual fatal jaw grip. Further, the fact that the tiger was unable to use its lower jaw effectively was amply evident through examination of the various corpses, to none of which was it the man-eater's custom to return for a second meal. The flesh had been scraped from them in a peculiar way, obviously by the upper-jaw working alone on the strips of human flesh, which this animal would lay bare with its powerful claws to facilitate the difficult task of eating.

With the advent of the man-eater, the activities of the erstwhile very energetic cattle-killing tiger which had been operating along the Yemmaydoddi and Lingadhalli routes, ceased abruptly, leaving room for the conclusion that it was this cattle-lifter, and none other, that had now developed into a man-eater. The story of the 'car-shikaris' did not become known for some time, till one of them, in a moment of boastful hilarity, revealed that they had fired at and wounded a tiger on the Birur-Lingadhalli Road. A subsequent piecing together of these facts brought the story to light as we now know it. As I have said, the man-

eater followed an almost well defined beat, killing at the outskirts of villages and hamlets bordering the places I have named, and in regular succession. These facts I gathered upon reading the reports that appeared in the Press regarding the beast's activities, and by marking off on my forest map the names of these places and the dates on which people had been killed.

The centre of this region, which the tiger had chosen as a regular beat, comprised the rocky and heavily forested slopes of the foothill range, topped by the hill called Hogar Khan, some 4,500 feet in height. I concluded that these fastnesses, almost without population, sheltered the tiger, that from them it made forays into the more populous areas in a series of almost regular calls. A study of the dates of past killings revealed that the animal almost regularly returned along its rounds every third or fourth month. The total number of killings had by this time reached twenty-seven. In making my attempt to shoot this animal, I decided to operate at the village of Hogarehalli, which lay almost midway between Birur and Lingadhalli, and was only three miles and a half from the base of Mount Hogar Khan itself through downwardly sloping scrub jungle. I selected this area primarily because I was fairly well acquainted with the geography of the surrounding forest, and was fairly well known to the inhabitants, from whom I could expect reasonable co-operation. Further, the village of Hogarehalli was, as I have said, near to the foothills of Hogar Khan, where I was sure the tiger had its headquarters. Most important of all, this village had not escaped losing a life every time the tiger passed on his rounds. In other words, it was almost a certain call for him.

I arrived at Hogarehalli a full fortnight before the close of the three-month cycle that is within two to six weeks of the next projected visit. Thus, I gave myself plenty of time to make inquiries into the details and nature of the various killings, and to arrive at a plan of circumventing this brute if possible.

The village itself is fairly large and although not very heavily populated, contains houses of a permanent nature, constructed from stone of reddish hue, which abounds in the vicinity, occurring in the form of flakes and varying in size from the palm of one's hand to an area of several square feet. Hogarehalli is also old; it dates from distant times and possesses two ancient and solidly built temples. It is bounded on the west, south-west and north-west by the dense scrub leading to Hogar Khan, and on the south by a large and beautiful lake that abounds with geese, wild duck and teal in the winter-months, to the south of which a track leads to the Yemmaydoddi water-channel about three miles away. To the southeast lies a belt of dense plantations of

coconut and banana trees, interspersed with the tall slim stems of the areca nut, the whole being thickly matted below by growths of the betel-vine, the leaves of which are liberally chewed by Indians throughout the peninsula. This area consists of very moist land, naturally low-lying and irrigated by a channel from the lake to the south of the village. Southward of Hogarehalli lie a few scattered rice fields, and then south-eastwards and east wards and northwards fields of dry crops, fed only by the monsoon rains, extending up to the Birur-Lingadhalli road, about 1 $_{1/2}$ miles away.

As you may have guessed by now, the majority of kills occurred in the scrub-belt to the west, south-west and north-west, while two had taken place in the heart of the coconut plantation itself, one of the victims being a cousin of the owner. The remaining and more open areas had been avoided by the man-eater. Furthermore, the kills had taken place in the late afternoon in the majority of cases, as the inhabitants had, since the killings commenced, cultivated the healthy habit of securing themselves indoors before sundown. The tiger's pug-marks had shown, on several occasions, that he had entered the outskirts of the village in early morning, but that the stoutly-built houses and solid

wooden doors had prevented him, at least so far, from effecting any nocturnal entries. It was difficult to formulate a plan of action in these circumstances. I knew that once the tiger killed he would move on and not visit Hogarehalli again for another three or four months. At the same time, it was humanly impossible for me to anticipate where the next man would be attacked and killed. The only remaining and obvious line of action, therefore, was for me to attempt to attract the tiger to myself by acting as bait, a procedure which, you may be quite well assured, 1 felt most reluctant to follow. Nevertheless, it appeared to be the only way.

Since my arrival at Hogarehalli a week had passed in obtaining all these details, studying the circumstances in which the various kills had taken place and visiting the spots where they had actually occurred. The time was now fast approaching when the man-eater's next visit fell due. I found that the victims in the scrub area to the west had been either woodcutters or herdsmen grazing cattle. Not one of the cattle had been harmed by the man-eater, although an occasional wandering panther had taken its toll. An idea then occurred to me, which, I flattered myself, was quite ingenious. Selecting a tree about half a mile in side this scrub, I arranged for a chair to be tied within its branches about fifteen feet from the ground and out of range of the tiger's leap. I then procured a stout piece of wood, about six feet in length and three inches in diameter, one end of which I suspended from a branch by a

stout cord while the other end rested, at an angle, against a branch of the tree below me. To this end I tied another piece of string, which I passed through a loop on to the front portion of my shoe. It was thus possible for me to remain comfortably seated in a chair, armed and prepared, while by merely moving my foot up and down on its heel, I would cause the piece of wood suspended below to strike against the branch it rested upon, emulating the sound made by a wood-cutter, although, of course, considerably less in volume. When one foot became tired, I could change the string to the other foot. I even left this string long enough to operate by hand, when, by increasing the length of the pull, I could increase the swing of the wood and consequently the noise of the blows. Above my head, as shelter from the sun, I arranged a canopy of the leaves of the tree itself, without cutting them. It was also comforting to know that I could smoke, eat, drink, cough and move about in my chair without any need for cramped concealment.

In fact, as I was acting as bait myself, the more I advertised my presence, the greater chance would there be of the tiger attempting to stalk or attack me. The patel or headman of Hogarehalli village, Moodlagiri Gowda, gave me his fullest co-operation. I explained my plan to him and stressed that from the time I started operating from my perch, it would be his business, at all costs, to see that nobody entered the scrub jungle, or the coconut plantation, thus ensuring that the tiger had no bait to attack but myself. This he promised to do, and forth with broadcast to the village, and to the surrounding areas, under threat of dire consequences, that nobody was to be about after midday, especially in the direction of the scrub jungle and plantation. There was enough hay and dried grass around the village on which to feed the cattle for a fortnight to three weeks, by which time I hoped the tiger would have put in an appearance. The Patel's instructions were all the more popular because nobody wished to die beneath the paws of the tiger, and because it provided the villagers with the attractive prospect of being completely idle for the next three weeks.

Precisely on the tenth day after my arrival at Hogarehalli, I began to put my plan to the test. After an early lunch I arrived at the tree shortly before n a.m. armed with water bottle, sandwiches and pipe, and of course my .405, and my first day's vigil commenced. Moving my foot to create the tapping sound was, I soon discovered, a monotonous and tiring pastime, added to which the reflected rays of the noonday sun caused me great discomfort and proved extremely tiring to the eyes, gazing as I must, through the shimmering heat haze, at the scrub jungle around me. I remained on my perch till sundown and continued to do so for the next week, without hearing or seeing any indication of

the tiger's return. By this time I had completely familiarized myself with the position of every large bush within my range of vision, and had men tally mapped out the various lines of approach, consistent with available cover, the tiger was likely to take in stalking me on my tree, that is, when and if he returned.

After the first unproductive week, and to relieve the deadly monotony I had experienced, I purchased a couple of cheap novels from the small bookstall at Birur Railway Station, which I read while sitting on my perch, automatically operating the string that pulled the tapping wood, and relying on my hearing to tell me of anything that was happening while I read. Thus I reached the end of the second week, still without any indication of the tiger's return.

It will be appreciated that by this time I was growing impatient; I was, in fact, very fed up with my forced in activity. I racked my brains to think of some better plan but failed to arrive at any conclusion offering a more likely line of action than the one I was following. We were now in the fourth month, and the return of the tiger was due at any time, provided of course that he was still following his beat. I had arranged with the Deputy commissioner at Chikmagalur, the headquarters town of the district, to keep me posted of all human kills in the area through his subordinate, the Amildar at Kadur, which was only four miles from Birur. A runner was to be dispatched to me as soon as any news was received of a kill, and sure enough, two days later the runner arrived from the Amildar, telling me the tiger had killed at a hamlet on the Chikmagalur-Sakrepatna road four days earlier. The very next day the runner came again, to inform me of the slaying of a cowherd on the northern shores of the Ironkere Lake. This was five miles from the Madak Lake, which in turn was about nine miles from Hogarehalli. Reports so far had been satisfactory, inasmuch as they definitely indicated that the tiger was still following his regular beat and was only some fourteen miles away at the time of the last killing, two days before the news had reached me. I could therefore expect that by this time the tiger was very near to the outskirts of Hogarehalli, if not already there, and as the morrow would make the third day since he had eaten, there was every hope that he would be eagerly looking for a fresh victim.

That evening I told Moodlagiri Gowda to warn the in habitants of Hogarehalli and the neighborhood that the killer was in the vicinity, and to keep away from the scrub area and the plantation at all costs. The next morning found me seated in my accustomed place even earlier than usual. This time I had not brought a novel, but concentrated on banging the piece of wood as loudly as I could, coughing, and moving

about on the branch of the tree so as to show myself as much as possible. In returning to the village that evening I took the greatest precautions against a surprise attack, but another two days passed and nothing happened. Nor did I receive any word regarding further kills. It now occurred to me that the tiger might have returned to his fastnesses in the Hogar Khan ridge, or perhaps by passed Hogarehalli and gone in a northwesterly direction to Lingadhalli and Bagavadkatte, or even westwards to Santaveri.

As the weather was comparatively warm and a half-moon had risen, I determined to spend the entire after noons and nights of the next two days in the tree, in the hope that I might thus be afforded an opportunity of attracting the tiger, which undoubtedly would also be on the move after dark. This would place a still greater strain on me, tired out as I was with fifteen days of fruitless sitting. Nevertheless, I determined to undertake the ordeal in a desperate attempt at success. The next forenoon found me back again, this time with a basket containing my dinner, a flask of hot tea, a blanket, water bottle, torch and other accoutrements that accompany the night-watcher who spends long, cramped hours on a tree. I also brought three tablets of Benzedrine to make sure that I did not fall asleep. I repeated the same ordeal of tapping all afternoon, and kept it up until late at night. The jungle was inordinately silent except for the call of a horned owl, and the far-away bark of a Kakar or jungle sheep. The moon set by 1 .30 am. and it became pitch dark and also very cold. Around 3 o'clock I felt sleepy and swallowed two out of the three tablets of Benzedrine. Half an hour later I heard a rustle, and then the excited cackle of a hyena as he winded or saw me. 'Ha \Ha\Ha\Ha\Ha\ What-have-we-here? Ha Ha\' he commented, and then slunk on his way in the darkness.

Again silence and darkness, till the pale glow of the false dawn heralded one hour to sunrise. That hour passed, and then, 'Whe-e-e-ew I Kuck-kaya-kaya-khuck'm', crowed the grey jungle cock, greeting the rising sun, as I dropped wearily from my perch, to struggle back to Hogarehalli and snatch four hours of sleep. Eleven a.m. found me back again on the tree to continue the tiresome watch. I had come to the conclusion that I could not stand much more of it. The hot afternoon passed as usual, the 'Tok-tok-tok-tok' of a green barbet, and the 'Ko-el ! Ko-yel of the Indian Kweel, which is related to the cuckoo family, being the only sounds. Evening approached, and a spur fowl, picking among the dried leaves below a nearby bush cried 'Kukurruka-wack. Kukurruka-wack.' There was the excited chatter of a group of birds colloquially known as the 'Seven-sisters' as they prepared to roost for the night, and as the sun sank below the slopes of Hogar Khan, a peacock issued his farewell note, 'Mia-a-oo- Ah-oo-Aaow-Ah-

h-o-o-Tar-h-oo.' Then the birds of the night took up the cry. 'Chyeece-Chyeece' chirped the Night-jars, as they flitted overhead, to alter their call to 'Chuckoo-chuckoo-chuckoo', when they perched on the ground or branches of trees nearby.

Ten o'clock came, and, shortly afterwards a series of calls 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!' from a herd of spotted deer in alarm. 'Aiow! Aiow!' they repeated persistently, in warning. Undoubtedly a carnivore was on the move, and had been seen or winded by the watchful hinds, but whether a panther or ordinary tiger or the man-eater itself, remained the question to be answered. I tapped louder and more vigorously with the wood, hoping the tiger would not ponder as to how this mysterious woodcutter came to be operating by night.

The minutes dragged on, and then there came abruptly the strident belling-cry of an alarmed sambar stag not half-a-mile away: 'Ponk\-Whee-onk\-Whee-onk\' he repeated, moving up towards Hogar Khan. Then deathly silence reigned again ! Continuing the tapping, I scanned every bush that was visible in the half-moon, mentally revising the various lines of cover I anticipated the tiger might take in stalking the tree. Nothing moved along any of these, and all was still, except for one last 'Ponk !' from the sambar, at a distance.

The strange feeling that something would occur at any moment came over me, and I felt that I was being watched, yet not a sound or crackle disturbed the stillness. Tapping away, I coughed, then moved and finally stood up from my seat, coughing and spitting in true Indian fashion. Yet not a sound, and then, like a bolt from the blue, he came!

'Woof! woof!' he roared, and an enormous grey mass, as large as a Shetland pony on wings, appeared as if by magic from behind a bush barely ten yards away, to charge the trunk of the tree and reach the crotch below me. A great grey head appeared only three yards directly below me; I depressed the torch switch and fired between the glaring eyes. With the explosion of the rifle the tiger fell backwards to earth, emitting a nerve-shattering roar. I put in a second shot. He acknowledged this, too, with a further roar, and the next second was gone. From the scrub a hundred yards away I heard a last 'Wrrr-uf !' and then complete silence.

I knew that neither of my shots had missed, but cursed myself, nevertheless, at not having dropped the animal with, at least, my second shot. Nevertheless I was certain it had been severely wounded and could not go very far. I allowed myself to doze for the rest of the night, and with the rising sun warily returned to Hogarehalli, to

organize plans for following up the wounded beast.

Moodlagiri Gowda rallied splendidly, and while I had a short rest, followed by hot tea, toast and bacon, arranged with the owner of a buffalo herd to drive his animals through the bush in the wake of the wounded tiger in the hope that it would be induced to reveal its whereabouts when the buffaloes came near.

By 9 a.m., I was back at my tree, accompanied by Moodlagiri, two scouts, fifteen buffaloes and their owner. First I ascended to the top of the tree, and tried to locate the tiger, but nothing could be seen. At the foot of the tree, splashed against the bark, were flecks of blood from his face or head, as my first bullet hit him. Behind the bush, where he had retreated, we picked up a copious blood-trail, showing my second shot had also taken effect. Thereafter we drove the buffaloes slowly in the direction the retreating tiger had taken, spreading them out as far as possible into a rough line. I followed the buffaloes, the two scouts keeping immediately behind me. Moodlagiri and the owner of the buffaloes remained in the tree where I had sat.

We had covered about 200 yards when we heard a deep growl. At the same time the line of buffaloes stopped, and lowered their heads, horns extended, in the direction from which the growl had come. A tree grew a little to my left, and I whispered to one of the scouts to climb it and see if he could locate the tiger. This he did, but signaled back to me that he could see nothing. The buffaloes had meantime backed from the spot, nor could we get them to go forward. Leaving them there, and the scout still up the tree he had ascended, the remaining scout and I tiptoed back to Moodlagiri and instructed him to return to the village and try to collect some of the village dogs to help us. This he agreed to do, but it was a full hour and a half before he returned, accompanied by two mongrels only, saying that these were all he could succeed in collecting. We now set the dogs on the buffaloes to cause them to move forward, and so gained twenty-five yards, when the tiger set up a horrible growling. The buffaloes immediately came to a standstill, while the curs began yapping vociferously. Creeping forward for shelter behind the two foremost buffaloes, I endeavored to peer between their legs in an attempt to penetrate the undergrowth and catch a glimpse of the tiger, but could see nothing. I then attempted to prod the animals forward, but one of them turned on me suddenly, and I narrowly escaped the sweep of the long horns.

My position was awkward in the extreme, with a wounded tiger before me that might charge at any moment, and nervous buffaloes around, that would defend themselves with their horns in a united stampede

against the tiger, or myself, whichever provoked them first. Re treating a few steps, I signaled to the scout, who was still in the tree, to descend. With his and the other scouts' help, I then began throwing stones over the buffaloes into the undergrowth at the point from which the growls had come. This action was greeted with a fresh outburst of growling, but nothing we could do would induce the tiger to break cover and show himself. Nor would he retreat, and this fact indicated that he was in a bad condition. Further stoning proving useless, I withdrew the two scouts, leaving the buffaloes where they were, and with their help, and accompanied by the two curs, made a wide detour of the jungle, to come up in the rear of the tiger and about 300 yards beyond it. From here we advanced very slowly, the scouts under my instructions climbing every tree and point of vantage as we crept forward in an Endeavour to see the tiger. Thus we covered some 200 yards, when one of the scouts signaled he could see some thing from the branch into which he had climbed. Descending, he whispered he had glimpsed a white and brown object beneath a bush about fifty yards away and roughly halfway to where the buffaloes were standing.

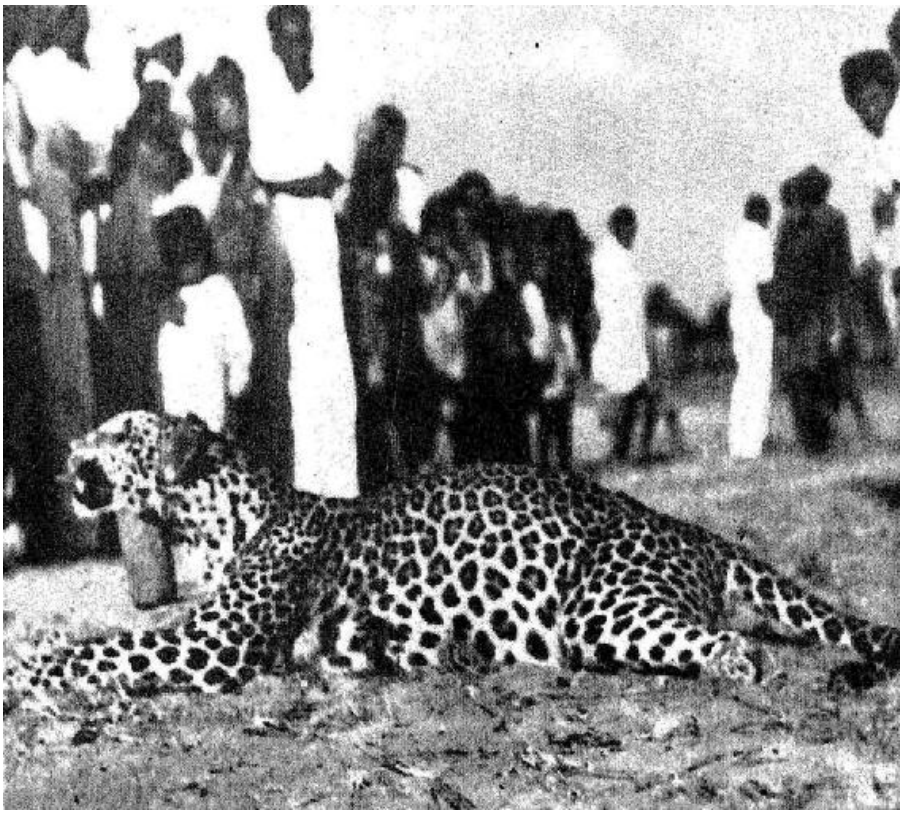
Climbing into the branch with him, he indicated a clump of bushes, at which I first stared in vain before I saw an indistinct brown and white patch just beyond the clump. Aiming at this object, I fired, and the tiger, mistaking the direction of our approach, charged the buffaloes with a series of short roars. The nearest was taken by surprise as the tiger leapt on him. The remainder got together and rushed forward with lowered horns. Meanwhile, the buffalo, which had been attacked, bellowed with pain and fear and endeavored to shake his adversary off. The tiger remained perched on the buffalo, snarling and growling vociferously.

From my point of vantage in the tree the scene was clear to me, but I dared not risk a shot for fear of killing the buffalo, or one of the herd that was fast approaching. And then the remaining buffaloes reached the spot and the scene became a medley of tossing horns and struggling brown bodies. Finding his position precarious the tiger leapt off the buffalo he was straddling and rushed back to cover, behind a bush only twenty-five yards away. I could clearly see him, crouched and watching the buffaloes. A single shot behind the left shoulder gave him his quietus. Later, on examining the tiger, I found that my first bullet of the night before had struck his right cheek, some two inches below and to the right of his eye, passing through his flesh and shattering his cheekbone. My second shot had cut through his belly, and in passing out had formed a gaping hole through which his entrails were trailing. My third and recent shot had penetrated his heart. The broken jaw, smashed by the 'car shikaris' months ago, had healed

badly, thus explaining why the animal had been unable to bite properly and had turned man-eater in consequence.

The attacked buffalo had been badly mauled by the powerful claws, but not bitten. Compensation satisfied the owner; I am certain the animal recovered from the wound, as buffaloes are invariably much hardier than cattle and can survive severe physical injuries. Thus ended the career of 'The Yemmaydoddi Man Eater', and while the district was well rid of a murderous and unrelenting killer, it must be remembered that the irresponsible and unsporting shot from the 'car shikaris' was the root cause of all the trouble, and to their discredit must be laid the twenty-nine innocent human lives that were lost.

The Killer of Jalahalli



THIS is not the story of a man-eating tiger, nor even of a man-eating panther, but of an ordinary leopard of very average size, who fought bravely in defense of its own life, fought cleverly and effectively, killing three persons and mauling eleven others in the process, dying gamely at last, undefeated and after days of suffering.

In 1938, prior to the outbreak of World War II, the village of Jalahalli, situated barely seven miles north-west of Bangalore, near the road to Tumkur, was an unimportant hamlet, perhaps boasting 150 houses, some of which were made of brick and others of thatch. As the city of Bangalore is the headquarters of the government of My sore, the Forest Department of that state, which is rich in forests of both evergreen and monsoon varieties, had its headquarters in Bangalore. The systematic loss and destruction of various forms of natural forest woods by insect and other pests was then engaging the close attention

of the Government, and a plantation of forest seedlings had been set within a mile of Jalahalli, covering about four square miles of land, in which sandalwood, rosewood, red rose wood and other trees had been grown in natural array, in order to study the action of the various insect pests (which had also been introduced), in close reach of the laboratories at Bangalore. These plants had grown to an average height of ten feet, while the usual undergrowth of spear-grass, lantana, and occasional wait-a-bit thorn thickly carpeted the ground, to form dense thickets that had become the home of innumerable snakes, quite a number of rabbits, an occasional pea-fowl, and of course partridge and quail in considerable quantity.

Into this area one day strayed a wandering leopard from the rocky hills of Magadi, twenty miles away. It began its sojourn by living on the rabbits, rats and other small in mates of the Forest Plantation, but soon learned that it had a ready larder in the nearby hamlet of Jalahalli, in the form of goats and village dogs, which it began to eat with irksome regularity.

All went well till one day the leopard destroyed a goat belonging to the fat police-daffedar (or Sergeant) of Jalahalli. This act the official held to be an affront to his dignity and rank, and he swore to avenge it with the death of the leopard. The native police force had been armed with service . rifles, from which the magazines were removed, so that only one round could be fired at a time. This had been done as a precautionary measure against over-enthusiastic policemen firing round after round into mobs during local riots, which are sometimes common at relatively slight provocation.

So the daffedar sat up in a tree over his dead goat, armed with a single-shot service .303. Along came the panther at sundown, quite unsuspectingly, to receive a wound in its left foreleg, for the daffedar's aim had become unaccountably unsteady due to equally unaccountably shaky hands. The panther bounded away with a grunt, the fat daffedar shivered through the night in his tree, descended next morning, examined the ground for blood but found none, and concluded that he had very fortunately missed the leopard. Anyhow, he figured that it had been taught a lesson and would leave his goats severely alone in future. This happened on a Friday night. The next day, Saturday, passed uneventfully, and that evening the villagers decided on conducting a large-scale rabbit beat the following morning. Yards and yards of two-foot high rabbit-net were laid along the edge of the Forest Department plantation, and around some three acres of casuarinas trees that adjoined it. The beat next morning was to be conducted by about a hundred villagers, accompanied by dogs and

armed with short wooden clubs. The rabbits would run into the nets and while struggling to get free, would be clubbed to death. All went according to plan till the casurina clump was reached, where, to the surprise and horror of all nearby, out jumped a leopard instead of a harmless rabbit. It rushed the ring of beaters in the near vicinity, and in less time than it takes to write had mauled six of them in various degrees of intensity from a scratch or two to a regular bite, or a deep raking from the razor-sharp claws. The beaters scattered in every direction and the panther returned to the casuarinas.

Nearby lived Hughey Plunkett and his mother. He had been a hunter of considerable repute in his days, having shot a round dozen tiger, and perhaps twice that number of panther, in the forest areas of Diguvametta in the Kurnool District of the Madras Presidency. The dispersed beaters approached him with news of the leopard, and appealed for help. Hughey had been spending a late morning in bed, and was in pajamas. He had not heard about the incident of the police daffedar's wounding the leopard, and scarcely credited the possibility of such an animal having strayed to within seven miles of the city of Bangalore. Anyhow, to appease the worrying villagers he slipped an L.G. and a ball cartridge into the respective barrels of his .12 bore shotgun, and accompanied them to the casurina belt.

Here he saw the mauled beaters and realized for the first time that a panther was actually in the vicinity. A careful stalk through the casurinas commenced, a small crowd of half-a-dozen men following in a knot at his rear. Hughey had passed more than halfway through the trees when the panther made the mistake of showing itself by darting from one patch of cover to the other. A quick left and right from Hughey bowled him over, and the animal lay twitching on its side.

Hughey dashed up, trailed by his followers, and then made the mistake, which cost him his life. He touched the now still form with his foot. The animal came to life, galvanized into action. It sprang upon Plunkett, fastened its fangs into his upper right arm, so that he could not use his weapon, while its hind claws raked him into streaming red ribbons. The men around scattered, only one of them attempting to beat off the animal with his ridiculous rabbit club. The panther then left Hughey and sprang upon this man, whom, together with four others, it clawed and bit before rushing back to the sheltering casuarinas, leaving its own blood-trail behind.

The scene of carnage can well be imagined, with Plunkett as its centre. It took quite sixty minutes for the men to pull themselves together and carry Hughey, who had fainted and whose right arm hung

on by a mere strip of sinew, back to his farm-house. He bled profusely during this journey, and I wondered, when following the trail two days later, that a human being could lose so much blood and still live.

Mrs. Plunkett, with commendable presence of mind, bundled him into their car, together with four of the more severely wounded men, and headed for the Bowring Hospital in Bangalore. The remaining seven mauled villagers were taken to the Victoria Hospital, also at Bangalore. Blood transfusion was given to Hughey and an effort made to save his arm, but when gangrenous symptoms set in the following day it was amputated. The shock and loss of blood proved too great for him, and he died the next day in a delirium of fever.

All this had happened on a Sunday morning. That same afternoon a wandering goat-herd observed the blood-trail of the leopard as it entered the outskirts of the Forest Department plantation, having left the casuarinas trees, and informed two brothers living in the village of Jalahalli, named Kalaiah and Papaiah respectively. Next morning Monday these two brothers very pluckily, albeit foolishly, determined to follow-up the leopard on their own. The elder brother, Kalaiah, owned a hammer .12 bore of old design. The younger brother, Papaiah, had a single-barreled muzzle-loader. Loading up, these two brave men, shoulder to shoulder, followed the blood-spoor into the undergrowth of the plantation.

Wandering along like this they became separated, and in a twinkling the leopard pounced upon Kalaiah, throwing him to the ground and biting through bladder and testicles with savage ferocity. The force of the pounce had knocked the .12 bore from his hands, and as he lay screaming with the animal on top of him, his younger brother rushed to the rescue, discharging his muzzle-loader into the panther as it lay on top of Kalaiah. How he did not also shoot his brother remains a mystery.

The leopard, now still further wounded, left Kalaiah and pounced on Papaiah, who fell on his face, the fangs tearing through his back into his lung, while the talons of the hind feet raked the unfortunate man's buttocks and the backs of his thighs. The animal then made off. I was eating lunch that day when a man appeared at my door in a lather of sweat to give me the news. Hastily, I grabbed rifle, shotgun and torch and jumped into the car, my wife, not to be outdone at the last moment, determining to come with me. As I turned out of the gate of our bungalow on to the main road, I met Eric Newcombe of the local police force, who was on his way to visit me. Telling him what had happened and making my apologies, I endeavored to get away, but

Eric refused to be excluded from the party and piled into the car also. It did not take us long to reach Jalahalli, and the sight that met us there was ludicrous in the extreme. Every in habitant, from the youngest to the oldest, had come out. A vast concourse had approached the edge of the plantation in order to catch a glimpse of the leopard, if possible. These had all taken to the branches of trees for personal safety, until the trees in the vicinity literally bent almost to breaking point with the load of humanity they carried. But nobody had gone forward to rescue Kalaiah and Papaiah, who still lay in the plantation where they had fallen four hours earlier, feebly shouting for help.

The first thing was obviously to succor these men, so we recruited a dozen carriers and entered the bush. Kalaiah we found in a very bad way and in extreme agony. Bubbles of blood were oozing from Papaiah's punctured lung. We conveyed them to the car, and I had started the engine to carry them to hospital, when a villager dashed up, with quite the longest spear I had ever seen in my life (of what practical use it is impossible to say, being up wards of twelve feet in length) and the news that he had just seen the panther slink into a big bush 300 yards away, where we could easily shoot it if we would only go with him.

I am aware that what happened hereafter was my own fault, in that I failed in my duty of first conveying the injured men to hospital. I plead, however, that the excitement of the situation and the temptation of this easy opportunity to bag the panther overcame my better judgment and caused me to go after the animal. Eric Newcombe insisted in accompanying me, so I handed him my .12 bore shotgun, loaded with L.G. in the left barrel and a lethal cartridge in the right, together with a few spare shells, while I retained the .405 rifle for my own use. This again was another mistake, as future events proved. I should have armed myself with the shotgun instead. We were accompanied only by the individual with the exaggerated spear, the remainder of our party having melted away. My wife brought up the rear, as a spectator, at a distance.

We approached to within twenty-five yards of the big patch of scrub not one particular bush as had been stated by the spearman into which the panther was seen to have crawled, and I told Eric to move over about thirty yards to my right, so as to avoid each other's line of fire, while completely covering the animal's every possible escape from the vicinity. I then instructed the spear-holder to stone the scrub, which he did very thoroughly for about twenty minutes. However, we heard and saw nothing. I confess that I then became very doubtful whether the panther was in the neighborhood at all. A little later Eric called out that

he could see right into the scrub and that the panther was not there.

By this time some bolder spirits from the crowd had joined us. One of them was accompanied by a dog, which we tried to induce to enter the scrub, in the hope that its sense of smell would locate the leopard. But the dog refused to have anything to do with this proposition, and remained on the outskirts, barking at the undergrowth. This made me revise my opinion with regard to the panther being absent. Eric had by this time, however, become impatient and approached to within a few yards of the scrub, which he then commenced to stone on his own account. Nothing happened when his first few stones fell. Then he threw a large one, which evidently landed directly on, or very near, the panther. There was a loud 'Augh! Augh!' and like a streak of yellow light the beast shot from out of the scrub. He had no time to raise the shotgun, but nervous reaction evidently compelled him to press his trigger-finger and thus probably save his life. The gun went off, blowing a hole in the ground before him and undoubtedly scaring the panther considerably. The next second it landed upon him, sweeping the gun out of his grasp, while Eric and panther, in close embrace, rolled down a short steep bank of khud and into the long spear grass that clothed a small adjacent nullah.

All this time Eric was shouting to me to shoot and the leopard growled horribly. I could only see the violent agitation of the spear grass. I rushed forward, afraid of risking a shot from my heavy rifle at such close quarters, which would pierce both the leopard and Eric, tangled up as they were together. Then the panther left Newcombe and sprang into the Lantana bordering the khud. I fired, and as subsequent events proved, scored but a furrowing wound along the top of the beast's neck.

I expected Eric to lie prone after that encounter but was gratified to see him spring to his feet and race in the opposite direction, at really marathon speed. I have often chided him on his running abilities since that day, and it is, with him, a very sore point. He had been bitten right through his side, one of the ribs being cracked by a fang, while his thighs and arms were badly lacerated by the sharp and powerful claws.

We called it a day then and went to the Bowring Hospital, the seats of the car being soaked with human blood by the time we got the three wounded men there. The rest of that evening was spent in writing statements for the police, and in answering innumerable questions, some of which were inane.

Poor Kalaiah died that night in extreme pain. His brother Papaiah recovered after a month, having narrowly missed succumbing to the injury to his lung. Eric Newcombe, due to the intervention of Providence and a good constitution, did not run even the slightest temperature and made a complete recovery in a fortnight. The next day, Tuesday, saw several hunters after the wounded animal. There was Lloydsworth of the Tobacco Factory, a famed shikari who had shot many tigers and panthers, and Beck, an equally renowned shot and big game hunter. Never a trace could we find, however. All blood trail had petered out, and the panther had vanished, seemingly into thin air. That evening it killed a herds boy, aged about twelve years, who had ventured too near the spot where, unknown to him, the beast was lying. Incidentally, this spot was over a mile from the locality where the earlier incidents had taken place. The boy was killed outright; the panther had seized his throat and bitten through the jugular and windpipe.

The morning of the fifth day, Wednesday, found me at the spot where the herds boy had been killed. We made every Endeavour to follow the wounded animal which, although very severely hit, had ceased bleeding by this time, due to the congealing of the blood, at least externally. I floundered about in the dense grass and lantana, which grew thicker as the ground sloped into a hollow. Halfway down this slope the leopard heard or saw me coming, and began to growl its warning against further approach. This was fortunate, for otherwise I might not be here to tell you his story. The undergrowth being almost impenetrable, I called a halt to further advance, which would have been suicidal and decided to await events, which I was almost certain would end in a day or two with the death of the panther from its many major wounds.

Later that day occurred an amusing incident. The police had turned out in force from Bangalore. Some thirty of them, armed with single-shot service rifles, had been crowded into a police-van, which was protected all around by expanded metal meshing against stoning by mobs during times of riot. The driver of this improvised armored car had been instructed to scour the plantation till the enemy was located and brought to book by the riflemen. This he proceeded to do to the best of his ability, but, not knowing where he was going in the long spear grass and tangled undergrowth, he eventually succeeded in half-capsizing the vehicle in a concealed, overgrown ditch. The driver and men were imprisoned inside and shouted lustily for help. None of them would venture out, for was there not a man-killing leopard loose that would kill and eat the first to alight?

Hearing cries at a distance, we approached the spot and released the imprisoned representatives of the law, who then managed to set their vehicle back on its wheels and return to their barracks, hardly any the worse for their adventure. Before leaving, they stated they had heard growls in the undergrowth, but this I put down to a bad attack of mass nerves. I had made it a point to be at the plantation daily from 7 a.m. till sunset, and at about noon on the sixth day, which was Thursday, I saw vultures gathering in the sky. Watching them through my binoculars, I saw them alight in the midst of the small valley that divided the plantation, the same one, in fact, as that into which I had tried to force my way the previous day.

I knew these sagacious birds had found something dead. It was either the panther itself, or something that had been killed by the panther. Cautiously I forced myself through the dense lantana and clinging wait-a-bit thorn, expecting any moment to hear the guttural coughs of the leopard as it charged me. Nothing happened, however, and at last, lacerated by the thorns, I reached the valley. I had gone about fifty yards when four vultures rose from the ground with a heavy flapping of wings. Advancing, I came on a small pool of water, with the panther lying dead beside it, in the act of drinking.

The unfortunate animal had bled internally a great deal and suffered the pangs of thirst and fever. The exertion of crawling to water and drinking must have increased the bleeding, for it had vomited great gout of thick blood into the water before dying, and this stained half the pool a clouded crimson. The vultures had just settled upon my arrival and fortunately had had no time to destroy the skin.

Going back to Jalahalli, I soon found the men to carry the dead animal to my car, lashed to a pole. I took it to Yesvantapur Police Station to make an official report. Here I was delayed for three hours while awaiting the arrival of the necessary officials, much to my annoyance, as I feared the skin might spoil from not being removed from the carcass.

At last I was given permission to take away the dead animal, which you may be sure I lost no time in doing. While skinning, I had ample opportunity to piece together the sequence of facts that had resulted in the death of three persons, and the several maulings. The wound in the leopard's left foreleg, which had been inflicted by the .303 bullet of the fat police daifedar, was crawling with worms and completely gangrenous. Hughey Plunkett's shotgun ball had passed completely through the animal, cutting through the stomach without inflicting an immediately fatal wound. A single L.G. pellet from the other barrel was

imbedded in the bone of the forehead and had evidently stunned the animal completely, allowing Plunkett to walk up and touch it. Five slugs from Papaiah's musket were embedded in its side, but all too far back to cause immediate effect. Lastly, my own thoroughly ineffective rifle shot, as the beast bounded away from Newcombe, had scored but a deep furrow across the back of the animal's neck.

I produced this skin at Court, in support of a claim for Government assistance by Kalaiah's family for the loss of their breadwinner, and the gift of a plot of land for their sustenance. I am glad to record that, in the course of time, the dead man's daring was recognized. With the advent of World War II, Jalahalli underwent a radical change. The Forest Department Plantation and the casurina trees were cut down and thousands of buildings appeared, first to house Italian Prisoners of War, then as one of the largest Hospital bases for the projected invasion of Burma and Malay, and latterly to house Air Force Personnel, being one of the main training bases in India for her rapidly expanding air arm. The skin of this panther now adorns the hall of my bungalow. I cannot help but record the deep admiration and respect in which I hold this beast. For while others killed in stealth, taking their victims unawares, this leopard fought cleanly and courageously in defense of its own life, against great odds, though it was severely wounded.

The Hermit of Devarayandurga

HE was called 'the hermit', because in many ways he resembled one, both in the choice of his abode, and in his eccentric habits. For he was an unusual tiger. Although no man-eater, and never once accredited with eating human flesh, he was of a particularly ferocious disposition and very hostile to the human race. He killed three people two men and a woman within the short space of five days, and all on the impulse of the moment and out of sheer aggressiveness. Further, his habits were unlike those of a tiger, in that he ate goats and village dogs, which tigers rarely do, especially dogs. And then again, he suddenly appeared in the scrub jungles clothing the hill of Devarayandurga, six miles from the town of Tumkur and within fifty miles of the city of Bangalore. Devarayandurga had not held a tiger for many a decade, being the home only of a few wild-pig and peafowl. The area did not boast a regular forest, but was covered with very ordinary scrub-jungle of lantana bushes and wait-a-bit thorn. Moreover, the hilltop was very rocky, and held a few small caves. In these an occasional small panther was known to take up residence, ousting the previous occupant, usually a porcupine, by the simple expedient of devouring it. But the caves hardly provided sufficient shelter, let alone a safe hiding place, for a large animal like a tiger. The whole area was but an island scrub among flat, cultivated fields, which no normal tiger would ever risk crossing either by day or by night.

But this is exactly what 'the hermit' did, for cross these fields it must have done, to reach the doubtful and scanty shelter provided by Devarayandurga hillock. At first no one knew that a tiger had appeared. The few villages that are scattered in the area began to suffer the loss of an unusual number of goats and dogs, and the loss was ascribed to a panther, till the tiger's pugmarks were picked up one morning traversing a ploughed field near one of these villages. Within the next two days a large cow was killed that had been left out to graze all-night within the hitherto safe outskirts of the village. The owner of this cow, an old woman, was very attached to the animal, and when she heard next morning that it had been killed, she proceeded to the spot, a quarter of a mile distant, where she squatted down beside her dead protégé and commenced to weep and wail aloud, calling heaven to witness the great sorrow she felt, and the loss she had suffered, with the death of her beloved cow. The other members of the small family had accompanied the old lady to the spot, and had sat around a while in silent sympathy, to listen to her weeping and wailing. But they soon grew tired of it, besides having other things to do, and one by one

they returned to the village, leaving the old woman alone beside her dead cow, still weeping with unabated vigor.

It was now 11 a.m., and a bright sun shone down on the scene. No ordinary tiger would have returned to its kill at such a time, in that glare and heat, and to a place disturbed by such noisy wailing, but 'the hermit' was not an ordinary tiger. This tiger did return and saw the old woman beside the kill, rocking herself to and fro while she cried aloud. The beast concluded that this noise was intolerable and must be stopped. So out it sprang on the old woman, and with a simple blow of a paw put an abrupt end to her life.

It then dragged the cow some yards away and ate a hearty meal. The body of the old woman was untouched, and her existence apparently forgotten by the tiger. When she did not return by 4 p.m., her family, judging that she must have exhausted herself with weeping and fallen asleep, came to the spot to take her home, when great was their surprise and horror to find she had been killed, while the tiger had made a hearty meal of the dead cow and returned into the brushwood. Rushing pell-mell back to the village, they spread the sad news. Soon the headman, armed with a muzzle-loader, and accompanied by two dozen stalwarts carrying a miscellany of hand weapons, came to the spot. They then attempted to follow the tiger's trail, but not for long, for the animal had entered the dense scrub quite close at hand. Being too afraid to enter the brushwood, they commenced to shout lustily and throw stones, and the headman discharged two musket shots into the air. Nothing happened and they turned back in order to carry the body to the village, when out rushed the tiger and pounced on the last man of the party the unfortunate headman, and incidentally the only member of the group to carry a firearm. He was dead before he became aware of what had happened. The party broke and fled to the village, and only late next morning did they return in great force to recover the two corpses, both of which had been untouched during the night. The tiger, however, had made a further meal of the cow.

For the next two days consternation reigned supreme. On the third morning, a traveler approached the village from Tumkur, driving before him two donkeys laden with a variety of goods. A mile down the road from the village the tiger pounced on the leading donkey, which collapsed beneath its attacker. The second donkey stood still, while the traveler, with a scream of terror, ran down the road whence he had come. His action appeared to provoke this extraordinary tiger, for it chased and killed him, and then returned to the dead donkey, which it carried away and ate. Both in chasing the man, and on its return, it had passed the second donkey, which it did not even touch. The body of

the man remained uneaten. These incidents, occurring so close to Bangalore, were headlined in the local Press; next morning I left for Devarayandurga by car, reaching the spot in just over two hours.

Questioning the frightened villagers, I was told the story as I have just recounted it. The weather being dry and the roads dusty, all pug-marks had disappeared by this time, and for a short while I was disinclined to believe that the marauder was a tiger, thinking it more likely to be a large and strangely-aggressive panther. The men who had accompanied the headman, however, and had witnessed his attack and death, assured me that it was indeed a tiger. Nevertheless, knowing how prone the villager is to exaggeration, I was still in doubt.

After a short lunch, I spent the afternoon, accompanied by an obviously nervous guide, in scouring the surrounding area, poking among the caves and tiring myself out completely in looking for 'the hermit'; but never a trace, nor a pug-mark, did I come across. At 4 p.m. I returned to the village, and with great difficulty procured a half-grown bull as bait, no buffaloes being available in this area. This bait I tied about three-quarters of a mile from the village, at a spot where the road was crossed by an extremely rocky and thorny nullah. It was now close on 6 o'clock, and as there was no time to erect a machan, I decided to spend the night at the Travelers' Bungalow at Tumkur, six miles away and return next morning, by which time I hoped the tiger would have killed the bait.

This I did, waking at 5 a.m. and reaching the spot where I had tied the bait by about 5.30. It was just growing light when I stopped the car a half-mile down the road, so as not to disturb 'the hermit', if he had made a kill. Approaching the spot cautiously, I found my bait had disappeared. Closer examination revealed the animal had been killed and the tethering rope severed, apparently by deliberate, and very vigorous tugging on the part of the slayer. Pugmarks were also visible, and these showed, first, that the killer was a tigress and not a tiger after all, and second, that this was an adult animal and large for a tigress. Remembering the stories I had been told of the peculiar nature of this animal and her disposition to attack suddenly, I followed the drag very cautiously, scanning the area ahead and on all sides most carefully at each step, looking behind me, too, every little while. Progress was thus very slow, but the drag was clearly visible nevertheless, and in 150 yards I came upon my dead bait. The tigress, apparently, had moved off. The young bull had been killed in the usual tiger fashion, its neck being broken. The tigress had then carried it to the place where it now lay, when she had sucked the blood from the jugular, as was evident by the deep fang-marks in the throat and the

dried blood on the surface. She may then have left the kill and returned later in the night, or settled down to a feed right away. The tail of the bait had been bitten off where it joined the body, and left at a distance of about ten feet; this is a habit normal to most tigers, and generally to big panthers also. Finally, the stomach and entrails had been neatly removed to a distance of again about ten feet, but not near where the tail had been left. The tigress had then begun her meal in the usual tiger fashion from the hindquarters, eating about half the bait. From all these facts it was therefore apparent that the tigress was not, after all, the very strange and eccentric animal she was reported to be. She just appeared to be a particularly bad-tempered female.

Hoping that she might return, I climbed a scraggy tree that grew about twenty yards away, and was the only cover available for my purpose. Here I remained till 9.30 a.m. No tigress appeared, but on the contrary the sharp-eyed vultures, from their soaring flight above, spotted the kill, and I soon heard the rattling sound of the wind against their wing-feathers, as they plummeted to earth for the anticipated feast. To save the kill from being consumed, I was therefore compelled to descend and cover it with branches broken from the adjacent bushes, afterwards returning to the car and making for the village. Here I procured the services of four men and came back to the tree, where I instructed them to put up my portable charpoy-machan, which I had brought with me in the car. By noon all was ready. One of the men then suggested that, as 'the hermit' was particularly fond of goats, I would considerably increase my chances of bagging her if I tied a live goat in the vicinity. The bleating of the goat, he said, would surely draw her to the spot, even if she had decided to abandon the half-eaten bull. Thinking there was something in the idea, I motored back to the village and soon returned with a half-grown goat of the size that usually bleat vociferously.

After some biscuits and tea, I ascended the machan after instructing the men to tie the goat only when I had taken my place; thus the goat would feel it was alone and bleat loudly as soon as they were gone. It was about 2 p.m. before the men finally departed, and very shortly afterwards the goat began to bleat in really grand style. This it kept up intermittently till about 5.45 in the evening, when I heard the tigress approaching by the low, moaning sound she occasionally emitted. The goat heard this too, stopped its bleating, and faced the direction of the sound while its state of stark terror was pitifully visible as it trembled violently from head to foot. Most unfortunately, the tigress was approaching from behind me. Though my charpoy-machan provided ample room for me to turn around, the trunk of the tree itself and a clump of exceptionally heavy wild-plum bushes that grew nearby

completely obstructed my line of vision. Moreover, the ground sloped steadily downwards from the direction in which the tigress was coming, and this probably caused her to spot my machan while she was still some distance away, being on a level with her eyes from the higher ground down which she was approaching. Or it might have been the extraordinary sixth sense, with which I have noticed some carnivora are particularly gifted, that put her on her guard. Whatever it was, that tigress sensed something suspicious in the surroundings and that danger lurked nearby, for she gave vent to a shattering, snarling roar and began to encircle the whole area repeatedly, roaring and snarling every little while. The unfortunate goat almost died with fright, and the last I could see of it as darkness fell was a huddled, trembling patch crouching close to the ground.

That extraordinary tigress made the night hideous with her roars until 9 p.m., when, with a final snarl, she walked away. Thereafter nothing happened, except for a sharp drop in temperature towards the early hours of the morning, when it became intensely, miserably cold. My teeth chattered in the tree, while those of the goat chattered below me, to a slower rhythm, but more audible or so I believed.

Dawn found us both exhausted after a sleepless night in the freezing cold. The goat was, moreover, so hoarse after its vigorous bleating of the night before, followed by the exposure, that although it opened its mouth in an effort to make some noise, no sound was forthcoming.

I spent two hours at midday looking for the tigress, with out finding a trace. I then selected another tree, this time of a leafy variety and overlooked by no rising ground, where I erected my machan, into which I ascended by 4 p.m., with another goat tethered below me. But this goat was as insensitive or as callous as the one of the night before had been sensitive and nervous; for with the departure of the villager who had tethered it, it settled placidly down on the ground to chew heaven knows what, which it continued to do until darkness hid it from view.

This time I had clad myself more warmly, and by mid night, closely wrapped in my blanket, I fell into a deep and dreamless slumber, to awaken at dawn to see that most placid of goats still chewing, again heaven knows what, as if there was not a single carnivore in the whole, wide world.

Again I searched for the tigress at noon, and again I failed; and again by 3 p.m. I was up in my machan, this time with a young bull as bait below me. It was 7 o'clock and almost dark, when unexpectedly a party

of villagers, carrying a lighted lantern, came from the village to tell me that the tigress had killed another cow only half-an-hour earlier, near the bund (or embankment) of a small tank, a furlong from the village, but in the opposite direction, and was engaged at that very moment in eating it.

Considering it a waste of time to remain, I therefore descended and, instructing the men to leave the bait where it was on the off chance of the tigress passing in that direction later in the night, hastened after them towards the village and the tank.

Once we reached the village I instructed them to extinguish the lantern. I then took only one of them as guide and advanced towards the tank. My companion whispered that the cow had been killed on the left of the road, hardly fifty yards from the verge and just a furlong from the village.

It was pitch dark by now, and, with the villager close behind me, and walking down the centre of the road, I switched on the torch, which was mounted on my rifle, and began to direct it to my left. There was a snarl and a 'woof, and then two large, red white orbs shone back at me from a distance I judged to be within 200 yards and at a slightly higher level. I was puzzled by this last factor, till the villager whispered that the tigress was standing on top of the bund of the small tank.

Walking along silently in my rubber shoes, with the villager following bare-footed behind, we made no noise whatever. Meanwhile the tigress stared back at the light. In this way I advanced down the road for more than 100 yards, till I reached the place where the tank-bund joined it. We then turned left, and commenced the slight ascent to the top of the bund. The tigress was now about 100 yards away and began to growl. I stopped, and was in the act of raising my rifle to my shoulder for a shot, when her courage gave way, and she turned tail and bolted along the top of the bund in three or four leaps, after which she descended to the right on the far side of the tank and was lost to view. We then walked along the top of the embankment, shining the torchlight down into the tangle of scrub. A large, solitary banyan-tree grew there, and great was our surprise when the eyes of the tigress reappeared at a fork in the tree, quite fifteen feet or more above the ground and level with the top of the tank-bund on which I was standing. It was surprising, because tigers generally do not climb trees to such heights, especially when followed by torch light,

I could now make out her form clearly, squatting doglike in the crotch of the tree. Taking careful aim between the shining orbs, I fired. There

was a loud thud as the tigress hit the earth, followed by a coughing grunt and then silence.

We walked along the tank-bund for some distance, shining the torchlight into the tangle of bushes below the bund to our right, but not another sound did we hear. Knowing that my bullet had struck 'the hermit', I decided to get some sleep and return next morning. Accordingly we retraced our steps to the village and to the spot where I had left the car, a mile away and beyond where my bait was secured. At Tumkur I ate a light dinner, washed down with some strong tea and a pipe-load of tobacco, after which I turned in for the night with the highest hopes of being able to pick up the tigress in the morning.

I was back at the village at daybreak and, collecting my assistant of the night before, we were soon on the tank bund, from which we very cautiously descended the sloping ground to the foot of the solitary banyan tree, in which the tigress had been sitting when I fired my shot. Our attention was immediately arrested by blood splashed over a wide area where the animal had hit the ground in falling off the tree. Looking about, we then found a segment of bone, about a square inch in area, in which a part of the lead of my .405 bullet was imbedded. By the sharp claw-marks on the tree-trunk we saw the way in which this extraordinary tigress had pulled her great weight up the tree to attain the fork. My companion soon climbed up nimbly to the same place, and found a few drops of blood in the fork itself. We then began very cautiously to follow the blood trail from the banyan tree, and it was soon apparent that the tigress had been hit in the head and was severely hurt. The blood-spoor zigzagged about aimlessly, going in a narrow circle and recrossing itself several times. She was obviously in a stunned condition, or perhaps blinded, and did not know what she was doing or where she was going. Frequently we came on large pools of clotted blood, and finally to a spot where the tigress had fallen, or probably lain on the ground for part of the night. The whole circle, roughly ten feet in diameter, was red with blood. When she had moved away, evidently in the early hours of the morning, bleeding had almost stopped, and only an occasional drop marked thereafter a wayward path into the dense undergrowth of lantana, grass and wait-a-bit thorn, that clothed the foot of the embankment.

First of all, we encircled this belt of undergrowth, right to the end of the long embankment some 200 yards away, and back again along its upper end, but there was no blood trail in any direction, or trace of the tigress having left this cover. She was obviously, therefore, somewhere in this belt of dense undergrowth, which, as I have just said, was about 200 yards long and varied in width from about

seventy-five yards to barely ten. But was she dead or alive? That was the question, and on the answer depended the lives and limbs of my companion and myself.

Returning to the spot where the last drop of blood indicated the place at which the tigress had entered the undergrowth, we then began systematically to beat the area. My companion and I, standing close together, hurled stone after stone into the massed vegetation, but only complete silence and stillness greeted our efforts. We progressed in this fashion along the edge of the belt of undergrowth. In hopes of getting the tigress to show herself, I fired five rounds in all into the lantana, but with out response from the tigress. About three-quarters of the way along this belt, a low tree, a dozen feet in height, stood out from the surrounding bushes. My companion slipped towards this, and began to climb it with the view to obtaining a better view, when, without warning, out came the tigress with a single roar and scrambled up behind him.

The man screamed with fright, while from my position, barely twenty yards away, I fired three rounds into the tawny form before it toppled backwards into the Lantana. 'The hermit' was dead at last. The tigress, as I had judged, was an old female with blunted fangs. Her age had probably forced her to seek easier living in the proximity of man, where there would be goats, dogs and cattle for easy killing. Hunger and old age probably accounted for her quick and vicious temper, but lack of courage, and an inborn aversion to man, had prevented her from actually becoming a man-eater, although I have little doubt that she would have eventually turned into one had she been allowed to continue her career unchecked. Incidentally, my bullet of the night be fore had struck her on the bridge of the nose, but rather high up, removing the piece of bone we had found, but at the same time not entering the head of the animal deeply enough to kill it. Indeed, it had actually ricocheted off, carrying the piece of bone with it, so that it was just possible the old 'hermit' might have recovered after all, despite the vast quantity of blood she had lost, had she not disclosed herself by attacking my companion as he climbed the tree.

Byra, the Poojaree

HE wore only a lungoti when I met him, a strip of cloth some three inches wide that passed between the thighs and connected, before and behind, to a piece of filthy knotted string that encircled the waist; but he was a gentleman to his finger-tips, and he was, and is, my friend. Twenty-five long years have passed since first I met Byra, and it happened in this wise.

The false dawn was lighting the eastern sky above the hills that encircle the little forest bungalow of Muthur, nestling at the foot of the lofty hill of Muthurmalai, that caused the winding jungle stream known as the Chinar River to alter its leisurely course through the dense jungle in a sharp southerly bend to complete the last seven miles of its journey through the wilds, before it joined the Cauvery River in rocky cataracts at Hogenaikal. It was midsummer, and the Chinar was at that time bone dry.

I had come out early and was padding noiselessly down the golden sands of the Chinar in the hope of surprising a bear, large numbers of which were accustomed, at that time of the year, to visit the banks of the river and gorge their fill on the luscious, purple, but somewhat astringent fruit of the 'Jumlum' tree, which grew to profusion in the locality. If not a bear, I hoped to meet a panther on his way home after a nightlong hunt. These animals, I knew, favoured closely skirting the undergrowth along the banks of the river on their lookout for prey that might cross the stream. Deer, in the way of sambar, jungle-sheep and the beautiful chital were fairly plentiful in those by-gone days, but such graceful quarry were not my objective that morning.

I had gone about a mile from the bungalow, and the light of the false-dawn was rapidly fading into that renewed period of darkness before the real dawn was to be heralded by the cry of the jungle-cock and the raucous call of pea-fowl, when I suddenly heard a surreptitious but distinct rustle from a clump of henna bushes that grew by the stream to my left.

That day I carried no torch, so cautiously approached the henna to within about ten feet and stopped. Then immediately before me I noticed that a large hole, about three feet in diameter and equally deep, had been dug, into which about a foot of water had trickled through the dry sands by sub-soil percolation. This, I knew, was the work of a poacher, to attract parched deer to quench their thirst, when

a well-delivered ball or hail of slugs from a muzzleloader would end their existence. And the noise I had heard had undoubtedly been made by the poacher himself, perhaps upon seeing me, or perhaps just stirring in his sleep after a nightlong vigil.

Calling out in Tamil for the man to come out or I would shoot, I at first received no answer. Upon advancing a few paces, a diminutive figure stood up from the undergrowth and, stepping forward on to the river sand, prostrated itself before me, touching the earth with its forehead in three distinct salutes.

Telling him to stand up, I asked who he was. 'Byra, a Poojaree', came the simple answer. 'Where is your gun?' I demanded. 'Gun, what gun? How can a poor, simple man like me own a gun? I cannot even shoot, master. I am a traveler and lost my way last night, and being very tired, fell asleep in these bushes. Your honor, by calling out just now, awoke me, and you ask for my gun ! I have never even seen such a thing.'

' Tick it up and bring it here,' I ordered. He hesitated a few seconds, then stooped down and brought forth an ancient matchlock, some yards in length, with a butt hardly three inches across at the widest point.

And that is how I met Byra, the Poojaree, and my friend for twenty-five years, who has taught me most of all I now know about the jungle and its wild, carefree, fierce, but lovable and most wonderful fauna. 'What have you shot?' I asked him. 'Nothing', he replied. 'No animal came to the water last night.'

'What did you shoot?' I demanded in a sterner tone. Bidding me to follow, he walked diagonally upstream towards the opposite bank. I saw a dark heap lying on the river sand, which, upon approach, turned out to be a sambar-doe, a great gaping hole in her neck, from which the blood had flowed to stain the fair white sands.

I looked at Byra witheringly, anger and indignation in my glance. 'Master, we are hungry', he said simply, 'and if I do not hunt we cannot eat, and if we do not eat, we

shall die'.

Squatting on the sands a few yards away, I invited Byra to sit beside me, and taking out some pipe-tobacco from my pouch, handed it to him. Receiving the tobacco from me on to the palm of his hand, he sniffed it suspiciously, and then, beaming with pleasure and satisfaction, introduced the lot into his system, by the simple process

of tilting back his head and pouring it down his mouth. The next few minutes were spent in silence, Byra being too busy chewing my tobacco !

'Master will not tell the forest-guard about my gun', he then ventured anxiously. 'It is my only way of living, and if the guard knows, he will come and take it away. Also I will be sent to jail, and my wife and four children will starve.'

Here was a pretty conundrum for my solution. My duty as a Forest License-holder was to hand over poachers to the authorities. Indeed the terms of the License actually authorized me to help in arresting such individuals. More over, my conscience urged me to have no sympathy for this rascal, who was ruthlessly murdering female deer by the most unsporting method of slaughtering them when they came to slake their burning thirst during the hot summer months. And yet, there was something likeable about the little fellow, and the degree of confidence he was now beginning to bestow upon me after our short acquaintance. Or perhaps my strong tobacco had induced this trust. Avoiding the question and a direct answer, I asked him where he lived. 'We have no homes, no hut, no fields,' he replied. 'All day we wander in the forest in search of bee hives. If we find one, we are lucky, for we gather the precious honey, which we take to market at the village of Pennagram, seven miles away. For a small pot of honey we may get one rupee. With this we shall buy ragi (a food grain), which may perhaps feed us for four days. If we do not find honey, we may be able to catch an "Oodumbu" (a large snake-lizard). This is even greater luck, for not only will we eat the "oodumbu", whose flesh is very good for our strength, but we shall sell its tail to the native doctor at Pennagram. He is a wonderful man, that doctor is. He cooks the tail and mixes with it some wonderful medicine. Then he mashes the whole thing into a fine powder, which he divides into paper packets and sells at eight annas a packet. These packets are sold to lovers, and are very efficacious. If a man sprinkles just a pinch of this powder on to the left shoulder of the girl he loves, she will not be able to resist him.'

Here he looked at me sideways. 'If your honor cannot capture the heart of the lady you love,' he continued confidentially, 'I will get some of this powder for you from this native doctor, free of charge, as he is a great friend of mine, and, moreover, beholden to me for the continued supply of oodumbu's tails. All you have to do is to sprinkle a little of it on the left shoulder of the mem-sahib you love, and she is yours, for ever and ever,'

Hastily telling him that I was not so much in love just then as to have to resort to oodumbu's tails, I bade him continue about himself.

'Sometimes, when we are very hungry, we dig for the roots of the jungle yam, which in these parts grows as a creeper with a three-pronged leaf. These yams, or roots, when roasted in a fire, or boiled with salt-water and curry powder, are very tasty and good to eat. At night my wife, children, and I sleep in a hole that we have dug in the banks of the Annaibiddahalla River, a small tributary of the Chinar River, as you may know, Sir. In the hot weather I go shooting, like I have done tonight. At such times my wife or one of the children, by turns, remain awake all night, to give the alarm should elephants approach, when they will then leave the hole and scramble up the bank or the big tree that grows beside our shelter. For these elephants are very dangerous and sometimes attack us. Only a year ago one of them pulled a poojaree woman out of a similar shelter, while she was asleep, and trampled her to pulp. Should we shoot anything, we eat some of the meat, and dry some by smoking. The rest we sell at Pennagram and perhaps get fifteen rupees for it. With the money we can purchase enough grain to feed the family for a whole month. Knowing this,' he concluded, coyly, 'I am sure you, the Maharaj, will not divulge the fact of my possessing the matchlock to the forest-guard. Incidentally, it belonged to my father, and his father before him, who, we are told, purchased it in those days for thirty rupees,' The rascal then looked at me winningly, a happy smile about the corners of his mouth, although there was an anxious look in his eyes. My sense of duty as a license holder vanished; I strangled my conscience then and there and replied in a voice which I tried unsuccessfully to make non-committal, but it was distinctly sheepish instead, 'No, Byra, I shall not tell, I promise you,'

He sprang to his feet and prostrated himself before me, his forehead again touching the ground three times in the only form of salutation the Poojarees know. 'I thank you from my heart, master, and on behalf of my family,' he said simply. 'Henceforward we are yours to command,' Having extracted a promise from Byra to call at the forest lodge later that day, as I wished to question him about the presence and movement of carnivora in the locality, I went my way, assiduously avoiding a second glance at the murdered sambar-doe, for fear my conscience should come to life again and cause me to regret my hasty promise to this plausible adventurer.

True to his word, Byra turned up at about ten that morning, and close questioning disclosed that just two nights earlier a tiger had passed within five feet of him when sitting up for sambar at a spot about two

miles downstream, called Aremanwoddu, where another tributary joined the Chinar. He said that this animal lived in the locality, was an old tiger, and that his beat was very restricted, probably due to his age.

Then he related an unusual story, to the effect that a month earlier he had been in hiding close to this very spot, when a Chital had appeared, which he had successfully accounted for with a single shot from his matchlock. It had been a bright moonlight night, and the chital having fallen in its tracks, Byra had reloaded his musket and was preparing to spend the rest of the night in sleep, when a large tiger had walked out of the undergrowth, passed the dead Chital, stopped, sniffed at it, and finally calmly picked it up and walked off with the prize. Byra had not dared to dispute ownership with the tiger, in consideration of the act that he was armed with a muzzle-loader, which took a considerable time to re-load.

I had no live bait with me at the time, and to procure a heifer meant sending to Pennagram, and probably a delay till the next day. So I decided to sit that night with Byra on the banks of Aremanwoddu, after telling him definitely that, at least as long as he was in my company, no deer poaching of any sort would be condoned. By 6 p.m. we were seated in an excellent and very comfortable hide that Byra had set up in the rushes clothing the confluence of the two jungle streams. The nights were warm and Byra wore nothing more than his lungoti. It was a lesson in patience I learned that day, for from the time Byra had first squatted in the rushes, he never moved as much as his forearm that whole long night. Nothing came that night, and by 2 a.m. I became impatient and finally fell asleep, to awake at dawn with Byra still squatting immovably beside me.

Seeing my disappointment, he offered to accompany me on a tracking venture later in the morning. So after returning to the bungalow for a bath and breakfast, we were back again at Aremanwoddu shortly before 9 a.m. With Byra in front we walked upstream, and had gone perhaps half-a-mile when we came upon the tracks of a large male tiger that had crossed the sand during the night and was making up the rocky incline of the Panapatti Ridge, a little over a mile away. The ground was too dry for tracking, but Byra said he thought he knew some likely spots where the tiger might be lying up.

So we continued, crossing ridge after ridge, exploring the little valleys of undergrowth and dense bamboo that lay between. Once we heard the rumbling sound produced by the digestive process-taking place in the cavernous stomach of an elephant. Giving the spot where he was resting a wide berth, we continued our peregrination, climbing upwards

continuously to the Panapatti Ridge.

We had now reached shrub-jungle level, and outcrops of rocky boulders appeared on all sides. Byra said that the tiger lived in one of the many caves that existed among the huge, piled rocks, as did bears too. Handicapped by the stony, sun-baked earth that did not show tracks of any kind, I was for turning back, but my companion had be come really interested by now, and advocated pushing on, over and across the ridge.

Streaming with sweat from exposure to the mercilessly blazing sun, we at last reached the summit and began to descend the opposite slope. On this face the ridge was even more boulder-strewn than was the one we had just climbed At last we came to a series of massive rocks, forming many caves. Byra advocated that I sit in the meager shade offered by an overhanging rock, while he explored the vicinity. I gladly assented and sat down to cool-off with a smoke, while my companion slipped away amidst the sea of boulders. Within ten minutes he was back, saying excitedly that he had smelt the tiger and was sure it was hiding in one of the caves close by. By this time I was distinctly disgruntled and incredulous, and told Byra, in a few terse words, to cut out the bluff. He looked at me with amazement, and then I could see condescending pity written plainly across his pudgy countenance. 'Come and see for yourself,' he said shortly, and without waiting for my reply, moved off the way he had come.

Following with my rifle, we approached a number of cavernous openings between piled boulders. Creeping with in twenty yards of the nearest, Byra halted and beckoned me to approach silently. 'Can you smell it,' he whispered. I sniffed carefully, but could smell nothing. There was certainly no odor such as one gets in a zoo or animal circus. I shook my head to indicate a negative reply. Stealing some distance closer, Byra halted again. 'Surely you can smell it now?' I exercised my olfactory organ to its utmost, and thought I could detect a peculiar odor, which for want of a better term I can only describe as 'greenish' that very indefinable smell of slightly decaying vegetable matter. Only after many years have I now learned to associate this smell as that of a passing tiger.

Byra looked upwards, scanning the five distinct openings that now showed between the huge boulders. He studied them in silence for a while, and then, indicating the fourth in line from us and almost the most unlikely in my opinion whispered, 'I think the tiger is in there,' I looked at him in evident disbelief, but ignoring my in credulity, he beckoned me to follow him, till at last, by working our way forward

soundlessly, and with infinite caution, we reached a stony ledge immediately below the opening he had indicated, which was just above the tops of our heads. Standing on tiptoe to peer in, I saw nothing, and then the very next second, soundlessly and as if by magic, appeared the massive head of a tiger, mild surprise written on its countenance.

My bullet struck it fairly between the eyes at a range of perhaps eight feet. The tiger slid forward in a queer gliding motion, and came to rest level with our faces, his massive head in repose between his fore-paws, his yellow-green eyes half-closed with the approach of death, and the drip, drip, drip of a thin, dark-red blood-stream that spouted from the hole in his forehead.

That was the first of my very many experiences of Byra's knowledge of jungle-lore. To say that I was immensely pleased at having discovered him would have been to put it very mildly, and as the years rolled by and our mutual confidence in each other increased, I have never regretted that occasion in the far distant past when I lulled my conscience to sleep.

I shall now tell just two of the many adventures we have experienced together, namely that of the bears of Talvadi, in which Byra so nobly offered his life for mine, and the story of the man-eating tiger of Mundachipallam.

Talvadi is the name given to the wide valley, through the centre of which trickles the mountain stream known by the same name. It is situated some eleven miles north of the spot where I first met Byra, and is quite one of the wildest spots of the Salem North Forest Division. The Talvadi river takes its rise in the forest plateau of Aiyur, whence it dips sharply into a mountainous gorge, locally known as Toluvabetta gorge, but re-christened by me as 'Spider Valley', because of the species of enormous red and yellow spiders that weave their monstrous webs across the narrow jungle trail. These webs are somewhat oval in shape and sometimes reach a width of over twenty feet. In the centre hangs the spider itself, often nine inches from leg-tip to leg-tip. Despite its size, it is a very agile creature and extremely ferocious, and its prey the large night moths and beautiful butterflies and insects of the forest stand no chance of escape once they become entangled in the huge web. These spiders are equally cannibalistic, and will not tolerate the presence of another member of their tribe within their own web. I have some times amused myself by transporting one of these fierce creatures at the end of a stick to the web of another of its kind, when a battle-royal immediately ensues, often lasting half-an-hour, but always ending in the death of one or

other creature, whose blood is then thoroughly sucked by the victor, till the loathsome insect is so gorged that it can only just crawl back to the centre of its web. The Talvadi stream passes down this gorge and then bifurcates, the lesser portion flowing southwards, bordered by the towering peak of Mount Gutherrain and the small hamlet of Kempekarai, to join the Chinar River in the stream of Annaibiddahalla. This area was once the stamping ground of the notorious rogue-elephant of Kempekarai, which killed seven humans, two or three cattle, smashed half-a-dozen bullock carts and overturned a three-ton lorry loaded with cut bamboos. However, that is another story.

The main portion of the stream flows westwards for some miles and, bordering the forest-block of Manchi, then turns southwestwards, crossing the forest-road leading from Anchetty to Muthur and Pennagram in the afore-mentioned valley of Talvadi.

As may be imagined, all this area is densely wooded, clothed on its higher reaches by miles upon miles of towering bamboo, and towards the lower levels by primeval forest, interspersed with rocky stretches, till it finally flows into the Cauvery river near the fishing village of Biligundlu. The whole area, from source to estuary, forms the home of herds of wild-elephant, a few bison, and invariably a tiger or two, which use the line of the stream as a regular beat. The Talvadi Valley itself, abounding in rocks and very long grass, is the habitat of large panthers, many bear, and wild pig, sambar, barking deer, and more peafowl than I have met anywhere else. My story begins at the time when Byra had sent word to me, in a letter written by the postmaster of Pennagram, that a panther of exceptional size had taken up its abode in the valley and was regularly killing cattle all along the Muthur-Anchetty road from the nth to the isth milestone. The letter asserted that the panther was of enormous proportions, 'much bigger than ordinary tiger,'

Having some five days to spare, I motored by the short cut road through the forest from Denkanikota to Anchetty and past Talvadi Valley to Muthur, where I met Byra. From there we returned to the 15th milestone, which was right in the valley itself. The road was really execrable, with many streams to be crossed, ruts made by cartwheels, and interspersed with boulders galore, taxing the car and its springs severely. After pitching camp, we went down to the nearest cattle-patti, some three-quarters of a mile distant, where I was able to hear for myself about the depredations of this panther. The story told was that it generally attacked the herds on their homeward journey to the pens about 5.30 p.m., and that it would select the largest cow among the stragglers for its victim. Several herdsmen had actually seen the

animal and attempted to drive it from its kills, only to be met with snarls and a show of ferocity quite exceptional for a panther. The animal was not known to live in any particular spot, but as I have said, ranged for about four miles along the road.

It was difficult to persuade these herdsmen to sell me live baits, as although they realized the slaying of the panther would benefit them directly, their caste and religious obsessions were such as to oppose absolutely the practice of deliberately sacrificing a life in this way. Albeit, by various methods I finally succeeded in purchasing two three-quarter grown animals, one of which I secured on the bank of the river itself, about a mile downstream from the road, and the second not far from the 14th milestone.

There was now nothing to be done but wait, and as I did not deem it wise to disturb the countryside by shooting the peafowl and jungle fowl that abounded, I contented myself by strolling in the forest in other directions, both morning and evening, in the hope of accidentally meeting the panther or perhaps a wandering tiger from the Cauvery.

As luck would have it, I received news at about 7 p.m. on the third day that the panther had that very evening killed a cow belonging to another cattle-patti three miles away, as the herd was returning home. A runner had been sent to inform me as soon as the loss was discovered, which had accounted for the passage of time. Grabbing rifle, torch and overcoat, Byra and I hastened to the spot, and when still some furlongs away I extinguished my torch, creeping forward in the wake of the herdsman who had brought us the news, Byra following at my rear. A half-moon was just raising its silver crescent above the ragged line of jungle hills that formed the eastern horizon, when we turned a sharp bend in the cattle-track and came upon a panther, crouched behind the dead bullock that lay across the track. I had armed myself with my .12 shotgun for work at close-quarters, while Byra, behind me, carried the Winchester, but before I could raise the gun, the panther bounded off the carcass and into the undergrowth beyond.

Hastily whispering to Byra and the herdsman to return slowly the way we had come, talking to each other in a normal tone to give the panther the impression we had departed, I dived behind a wild-plum bush that grew some twenty paces away, hoping the animal would return. The panther did not take long to advertise its presence, for within a few minutes I heard its sawing call from the forest before me. The sound gradually receded in the direction Byra and the herdsman had taken, by which I interpreted that it was following them at a

distance, probably to ensure that they had really departed. Afterwards there was tense silence, unbroken by any sound for perhaps the best part of an hour. And then, as if from nowhere, and unheralded by even the faintest rustle of dried leaves or crackle of broken twig, appeared an enormous panther, standing over its kill, but still looking suspiciously down the track we had just traversed. Aiming behind the shoulder as best I could in the half-light, the roar of the gun was followed by the panther leaping almost a yard into the air. Without touching earth again it convulsed itself into a spring and was gone before I could fire the second barrel. Its departure was heralded by the unmistakably low, rasping grunts of a wounded panther. Waiting for a few minutes, till the sound died away, and realizing that nothing further could be accomplished that night, I retraced my steps to the cattle-patti and to camp.

By dawn next morning, Byra and I were at the place of my encounter. Casting about where the animal had disappeared, it did not take long for Byra to detect a blood trail on the leaves of the undergrowth through which the animal had dashed away. Heartened by the fact that at least some of my L.G. pellets had found their mark, I took the lead, this time armed with the rifle, Byra following close behind and guiding me on the trail. In this formation, it was my business to keep a sharp lookout for the animal, and deal with it should it charge, while Byra, in the slightly safer position behind me, could concentrate on his tracking. Within the first 100 yards we came to a spot where the animal had lain down, as revealed by the crimson stain that covered the grass and the unmistakable outline of the body. From here the animal had slithered down the banks of a narrow nullah, densely overgrown with bushes on both sides, where following up became trebly difficult and hazardous.

As we tiptoed forward, with many a halt to listen, I scanned each bush before me, striving to penetrate its recesses for a glimmer of the spotted hide, alive or dead now, we did not know. I strove to pierce with my eyes the rank undergrowth of jungle-grass that grew between the bushes, and to look behind the boles of trees and rocks that fortunately were few in number just there. We had advanced a comparatively few paces in this way when suddenly, from out of a hole in the ground before me, rose a shaggy black shape, a smaller similar shape tumbling off beside it. We had stumbled upon a mother-bear with her young, asleep in the hole she had dug overnight in the bed of the nullah, in her assiduous search for roots !

I could see the white V mark on her chest distinctly as she half-rose to her feet, surprise and then fury showing in her beady, black eyes. Down she went on all fours again, to come straight at us. Thrusting the

muzzle of the Winchester almost into her mouth, I pressed the trigger. Then occurred that all-important moment, which balances the life or ignominious death of the hunter : a misfire !

The she-bear closed her jaws on the muzzle, and with one sweep of her long-toed forepaw wrested the weapon from my grasp, so that it hung ludicrously from her mouth for a moment before she dropped it to the ground. In voluntarily I had stumbled backwards, and as the bear rose to her feet to attack my face, which is the part of a human anatomy always, first bitten by these animals. Byra attempted the supreme sacrifice. Nimbly throwing himself between me and the infuriated beast, he shouted at the top of his lungs in a last-minute attempt to divert its further onslaught. He was successful only to the extent that it turned its attention upon him, seemingly to forget my existence for the moment.

As he ducked his head in the very nick of time, the bear buried its fangs in Byra's right shoulder, while the long talons of its forefeet tore at his chest, sides and back. Byra went down with the bear on top of him. I sprang for the fallen rifle. Working the under-lever to eject the misfired cartridge, I found to my horror that, with the force of its fall, the action of the rifle had jammed. All this took only a few seconds. Byra screamed in agony, while the bear growled savagely. Stumbling forward and using the rifle as a cudgel, I smote with the butt-end with all my might at the back of the animal's head. Fortunately my aim was true, for the bear released Byra and like lightning grabbed the rifle in its mouth, this time by the butt, again tearing the weapon from my grasp. It then started to bite the stock savagely. By an act of Providence the cub, which during all this time had remained in the background, a surprised and obviously terrified witness, at this juncture let out a series of frightened whimpers and yelps. As if by magic the attention of the irascible mother became focused on her baby, for she dropped the rifle and ran to its side. There she sniffed it over to assure herself that all was well, and as suddenly as this unwelcome pair had appeared on the scene, they disappeared, a few last whimpering from the now reassured youngster forming the last notes to that unforgettable scene of horror, from which it took me days to recover.

Byra ,was on his hands and knees, streaming with blood and evidently in great pain. Going across to him, I removed my coat and shirt, tearing the latter into strips and attempting to bind up the more serious of his wounds and to stem the bleeding. Then, hoisting him on my back and carrying my damaged rifle, I staggered back to the cattlepatti, where I placed him on a charpoy. Four herdsmen carried him to my camp, where I poured raw iodine into the wounds. Camp was struck

and in a few moments my car was jolting the fifteen miles to the village of Pennagram, where at the dispensary rough first aid was rendered.

By this time the poor man was faint with the loss of blood and almost unconscious. Replacing him in the car, I covered the sixty-one miles to the town of Salem, where there was a first-class hospital, in almost record time.

Penicillin was unknown in those far-off days, and the first week that Byra spent in hospital, hovering between life and death, with me at his side, was an anxious time. But his sturdy constitution won through and after the first few days the doctors definitely pronounced him out of danger.

I returned to Pennagram, where Byra's wife and children had come and were anxiously awaiting news. Giving them some financial help, I also received a surprise when I was presented with the worm-eaten skin of the panther, which I had quite forgotten in the excitement and pressure of subsequent events. It appeared that the sight of vultures on a carcass had attracted some of the herdsmen of the cattlepatti at Talvadi, who had found the body of the animal within 200 yards of where the adventure with the bear had occurred. It was stated to have been an outsize specimen, but as I have said, the skin was worm-eaten and beyond preserving.

Returning to Salem, I left sufficient money to cover Byra's treatment, expenses and final return to his native haunts at Muthur, but it was over two months before he could go back to his family with a slight permanent limp in his right leg due to the shortening of a damaged muscle, and with many permanent scars on his body as reminder of the incident.

My rifle needed a new stock, and to this day, six inches from the muzzle, it bears the marks of the she-bear's teeth. Thus ended the adventure which formed the blood-brother hood, so to speak, between Byra and myself, founded on his attempted cheerful sacrifice and almost literal fulfillment of the words 'greater love than this hath no man, than that he should lay down his life for another,'

Many years passed after this occurrence to the occasion of my next story, that of the man-eating tiger of Mundachipallam. Mundachipallam or to give it its literal Tamil translation, the hollow, or stream, of Mundachi is nothing more than a rivulet skirting the base of the Ghat section, half way between the 2,000 foot high plateau occupied by the village of Pennagram and the bed of the Cauvery River, only some 700 feet above sea-level. This stream crosses the Ghat Road, which drops

steeply from Pennagram to the Cauvery River at a point just about four miles from the destination of the road where stands the fishing hamlet of Ootaimalai above the famed water-falls of Hogenaikal. The Forest Department has constructed a well on the banks of Mundachipallam, beside the road, to facilitate the watering of cattle, especially buffaloes and bullocks, drawing heavily laden cans of timber and bamboo, before they begin the remaining six miles of steep ascent to Pennagram. This little well, surrounded as it is by dense jungle, except for the narrow ribbon of road and the small width of Mundachipallam, which cross at right angles, is the spot where my story begins and, strangely enough, ends, though only after many deaths, and the narrow escape of Ranga, my shikari.

It was early morning, about 7.30 am., and droplets of dew twinkled on the grass like myriads of diamonds cast far and wide, as they met, scintillated, and reflected the rays of the newly-risen sun, filtering through the leafy branches of the giant 'muthee' trees and the tall straight stems of the wild-cotton trees that bordered the shallow banks of Mundachipallam. One man and two women, carrying round bamboo baskets, laden with river fish netted during the night on the Cauvery River, approached the well and laid down their heavy burdens on the low parapet wall that encircles it. The man unwound a thin fiber rope, coiled around his waist, and slipping one end of it over the narrow neck of a rounded brass lotah, carried by one of the women, let the receptacle down the well, from which he presently withdrew a supply of cold, fresh water. In accordance with the normal village custom, where a man comes before a woman, he began to pour the contents down his throat in a steady silvery stream, not allowing his lips to touch the mouth of the vessel, for to do so was considered unhygienic. The fish were being taken to market at Pennagram, and this was the last water available before tackling the stiff climb to their destination. After drinking his fill, the man returned the lotah to the well and twice refilled it, for the benefit of the two maidens who accompanied him. They were in their twenties and wore nothing above their waists beyond the last fold of their graceful sarees, which passed diagonally across one shoulder. Their smooth dark skins glistened with sweat despite the coolness of early morning, due to the heavy load of fish they had carried for four miles from the big river.

After drinking, the party sat down for a few minutes, each member producing a small cloth bag, from which were taken some 'betel' leaves, broken sections of areca-nut and semi-liquid 'chunam' or lime of paste-like consistency. Some sections of nut were placed in an open leaf, which was liberally smeared with the chunam, and then chewed with evident relish. In a few minutes the mouths of all the members

exuded blood-red saliva, which was freely expectorated thereafter in all directions. Just then, rustling and crackling was heard from the undergrowth bordering the well. These sounds ceased and began again at intervals. There was no other sound. The trio conjectured among themselves as to the cause of these sounds, and reached the conclusion that it was some member of the deer family, probably injured by gun shot wounds or wild-dogs or some other animal, and struggling to get to its feet. Urged on by the hope of obtaining easy meat, and undoubtedly in order to impress the females of the party, the man got up and, with a stone in his hand, walked into the jungle. The noise had momentarily ceased, and he penetrated further to try to find the cause of the disturbance. Rounding a Babul tree that grew in the midst of a clump of bushes, he was petrified when he almost walked into a pair of tigers, probably engaged in the act of mating. Now a normal tiger is a beast with which very wide liberties may be taken. When once out fishing, I was surprised by a tiger that broke cover hardly fifteen paces away; it was difficult to tell which of us was more alarmed by the presence of the other at the time. Anyhow, that tiger simply sheered off the way he had come, and although unarmed at the time, curiosity and natural excitement urged me to follow it, to ascertain if possible the presence of a kill. But it just kept running before me like any village cur, till I eventually lost it among the many bushes that grew around. But there are with tigers certain moments when even they demand privacy. Or it may have been the urge to show off to the female of the species, an urge which I have known affect otherwise quiet men in a very surprising manner. Anyhow, this tiger definitely resented the intrusion and with a short roar he was upon the unfortunate fish-seller, burying his fangs through the back of his neck and almost severing the spinal column. Not a sound escaped the man as he fell to earth, the tiger still growling over him. The two women had heard the short roar and, recognizing the sound as that of a tiger, fled the way they had come to Ootaimalai. The victim was not eaten on this occasion, the effort having been but a gesture of annoyance at being disturbed at the wrong moment, but it had taught that particular tiger the obvious helplessness of a human being.

Some weeks later, a woodcutter, carrying his burden from the forest, encountered the same tiger on turning a bend in the path. Again that short roar, followed by the deadly spring, and another man lay dead, killed for no reason at all. Again the tiger did not eat. Two months passed, and a party of women had gone into the forest to gather the fruit of wild tamarind trees that grew in profusion throughout the valley. One of them had strayed a little away from the rest. She had stooped down to lift the basket to her head, when, looking up, she met the

glaring eyes of the great cat. A single shrill scream escaped her before that short roar sounded for the third time and the cruel fangs buried themselves in her throat.

This time the jugular was severed and the salty blood spouted into the tiger's mouth; thus was born the man-eating tiger of Mundachipallam. The woman was dragged away to some bushes and there devoured, except for her skull, the palms of her hands, and the soles of her feet. Three more deliberate kills followed in quick succession, one at the 7th milestone of the road itself, the other by the banks of the Chinar River near to its confluence with the Cauvery, and the third but a mile from the village of Ootaimalai itself. In all three cases the victims were eaten, or partly eaten.

It was this last kill that caused the greatest consternation, leading the villagers of Ootaimalai to come in deputation to Pennagram to beg the authorities to take some action to rid them of the menace that now threatened their very village. Ranga, my shikari, was there at the time and promised them that he would persuade me to help, and having made the promise, travelled the hundred odd miles to Bangalore by bus, arriving late in the evening to present his report. Now a few words about Ranga will not be amiss at this stage. Strangely enough, I had also met him at Muthur, where I had met Byra some years earlier. Ranga was the hired driver of a buffalo-cart, used to haul cut bamboo from the forest to Pennagram. He had initiative how ever and in his spare time, was given to poaching, like Byra, with a matchlock that he hired for the occasion. He was a very different man from Byra, however, in both physical and personal attributes. For he was tall and powerful compared with Byra's somewhat puny build, and showed a forceful and distinctly positive character in all his undertakings. He had spent a year in jail for the attempted murder of his first wife, whom he had stabbed in the neck in a jealous quarrel. After returning from jail he had married again, and at the time I first met him had three children. Not being content, he later took one more wife and now had a dozen children in all, and was a grand father besides. He had better organizing capacity than Byra and got things done when required. I have known him to thrash a recalcitrant native thoroughly for not obeying instructions. He has also a lucrative side to his character trade in liquor illicitly distilled in the forest from Babul bark and other ingredients. I have sampled some of his produce and can tell you it is the nearest approach to liquid fire that I have known. Lastly, he is a far more dishonest man than Byra and given to petty pilfering, especially of .12 bore cartridges. He despises Byra, whom he looks down upon as a semi-savage. Secretly, I think he is jealous of my affection for the little Poojaree. But Ranga is a brave man, staunch and reliable in the

face of danger, who certainly fears no jungle animal or forest-spook, as do the vast majority of other native shikaris. Unfortunately, Ranga came at a time when I was very busy and could not possibly leave the station for another fortnight. So I sent him back to Pennagram with a number of addressed envelopes and instructions to write to me every second day, regardless of events.

My inability to answer Ranga's first summons was perhaps indirectly responsible for two fresh tragedies that occurred before I was able at last to pick Ranga up in my car at Pennagram, motor down to Muthur for Byra, and arrive at Ootaimalai, where I was joined by a third Hench man, an old associate named Sowree. This Sowree, like Ranga, was quite a versatile fellow, and had himself spent three months in jail for shooting and killing a wild elephant with his muzzle-loader while on a poaching trip.

The elephant was a half-grown cow and had approached the hide in which Sowree lay concealed. Fearing that it might really tread upon him, Sowree had aimed his musket behind its left ear. The solid ball had only too effectively done its work, and the elephant dropped in its tracks. Unfortunately for him, he was caught red-handed. I had been shooting on the Coimbatore bank at the time,' and had seen and photographed the elephant, which incidentally was how I met Sowree.

I was extremely fortunate in being able to obtain the services of these three men, as in their varied spheres and capabilities, they presented a vast store of jungle experience and ability. Byra at once volunteered to scout around the neighboring forest, and along the Coimbatore bank, in an effort to ascertain the immediate whereabouts of the tiger. This I emphatically forbade him to do, as being suicidal. We finally compromised by agreeing that he should be accompanied by Sowree, armed with my .12 bore gun, and another man who, very surprisingly, bore the name of Lucas and was a 'Watcher' in the employ of the Government Fisheries Department. Ranga was given the job of obtaining three baits and tying them out in likely spots. The usual difficulty in obtaining animals was met, but the resourceful Ranga quickly overcame it by threats and other expedients, of which I was not supposed to know.

The first of the three baits was tied a mile up the Chinar River from where it joined the Cauvery and the second some three miles further on, where Mundachipallam met the Chinar. The third was tethered within 100 yards of the well where the first tragedy had occurred. On alternative days, Byra and his party would scour the forests on one bank of the Cauvery, while I, with a local guide, combed the opposite bank. Ranga, as I have said, attended to the feeding and watering of the baits.

In this way we spent four days, while nothing happened. Tiger pugs were discovered at several localities, but they were not fresh, and nobody could tell with certainty whether they belonged to the man-eater or some other animal.

There was no possibility of driving the man-killer to cattle killing to avoid starvation, by prohibiting the villagers from entering the forests or using the road to Pennagram. To begin with, considerable traffic existed along this road, as it formed a main artery to the many hamlets lying on the opposite bank of the Cauvery. In addition, the forests, particularly on the Coimbatore side, were plentifully stocked with game, to which the tiger could always turn in necessity.

In the meantime I endeavored by every possible means to spread the news of my presence and purpose to all surrounding hamlets, in order that I might hear of any fresh kill with the least possible delay. There was then some hope, with Byra's expert help, of being able to track the animal to where it was lying up, or perhaps even to its lair. Beating was out of the question, even if there had been volunteers for the task, of which there were none, as we were dealing with a very bold and clever animal, who would as likely as not add one more victim to his list from

among the beaters themselves.

Early in the morning of the fifth day, I received news that a man had been killed at Panapatti cattle-pen, some four miles away, late that previous evening. He had gone out of his hut for 100 yards to call his dog, which was missing, and had not been heard of again. We hurried to the spot and Byra was successful in discovering the spot at which the man had been attacked : the great splayed-out pugs of the tiger were soon clearly visible across the sandy bed of the Chinar River as he had dragged his victim across and through the intervening reeds to the borders of the sloping bamboo forest beyond. Here we discovered the remains, almost totally devoured.

No trees were available, except for a mighty clump of bamboo that grew some thirty feet from the remains. In side this I instructed Byra to make me a suitable hide by the simple expedient of removing some eight or nine of the stout bamboo stems, cutting through them about four feet from the ground and again at the ground level, and then taking out the intervening four-foot lengths. The upper parts of the bamboo stems being in the centre of the clump, would not fall to earth, so entangled were the tops with the fronds of neighboring stems and those of other clumps.

After completing his work, Byra had succeeded in making a sort of hollow cave for me in the midst of the clump. Seated in the middle of this I knew I would be quite safe from attack by the tiger, either from behind or from either side, as he could not get at me owing to the numerous intervening stems. The only way he could reach me was from in front, and this I felt quite capable of countering provided I kept myself awake throughout the night.

The faithful Poojaree persisted in his wish to sit with me, till I was compelled to order him peremptorily to go. I would, indeed, have been glad of his company, but the space we had cleared in the midst of the bamboo-clump offered only restricted accommodation to one individual. To cut more steins to increase this space meant that we were reaching the outskirts of the clump and the unsupported bamboo stems would then fall to earth, not only causing much disturbance by the crash, but littering the surroundings with debris, which might quite possibly frighten the tiger away.

The night would be dark, with no moon, so I took the precaution of clamping my spare shooting light to my shotgun, which I carried into the hide with me, in addition to the Winchester, with its own lighting arrangement. Being in the midst of the bamboo, I knew I was almost

completely sheltered from the dew and the cold jungle air, and fairly safe from snakes or so I thought. I was in position by 1 p.m., and sent my followers away Byra still protesting with instructions to call to me from the bed of the Chinar next morning before approaching. With their departure I was left to my own devices for the next seventeen hours.

You will appreciate that from my position in the midst of the bamboo-clump my view was entirely restricted on all sides except for the narrow lane of jungle right in front of me, with the human cadaver in the foreground. Much as I would have preferred a wider range of vision, I knew I would be thankful once the hours of darkness fell, as the more I could see by day the more I would be exposed to the man-eater after dark, when the tables would be turned and he could see while I could not. The human remains, being hidden from the sky by the canopy of overhanging bamboos, were not troubled by vultures. Flies, however, covered it in hordes and the stench soon began to get painfully noticeable. I will not burden you with descriptions of the sounds of a jungle evening and the close of a jungle day, beyond mentioning that they were practically all present on that occasion and offered sweet accord to my jungle-loving ears. Nothing happened before darkness set in, which it did both earnestly and rapidly, till I was left in Stygian blackness, intensified by the additional shadows cast by the towering bamboo stems above me. It was so dark that I could not see my own hands as they rested on my lap; I would have to feel for the trigger and the torch switch, and indeed, everything. All that was visible was the luminous dial of my wristwatch showing that it was a quarter to eight. Ten long hours before daylight came.

I knew that during this time I would have to strain myself to the utmost in pitting my poor, human, and town-bred skill against that of the king of the jungles, at which he was a past-master, with decades of skilful ancestors behind him; namely, at listening and hearing. For I could not see an inch before me, while he could see clearly. Nor could I smell him at all, but neither could he smell me. For success I would have to depend entirely on my hearing the sound of his soft approach, and I well knew from long experience how soundless the approach of a cautious tiger can be. I would have to remain absolutely silent myself; worse, the slightest movement or sound from me would betray my presence to those ever-acute ears, and once he knew I was there, only one of two possible things could happen. Either his courage would fail him and he would desert the kill, or he would attack me by a sudden pounce through the opening in front of me, before I was aware of his coming. I certainly had no wish to become the next item on his menu.

Therefore, I could do nothing but sit absolutely and completely still.

Mosquitoes found their way even inside that clump, and tortured me acutely. Once some cold creeping thing passed across my lap. It had length but no legs and was undoubtedly a snake. Movement at that time meant a bite and, if it was a poisonous snake, possibly death. With extreme difficulty I controlled my twitching nerves, and the snake glided away. I could just sense its rustle as it slipped between the intervening bamboo stems and was gone.

By and by my throat began to tickle and I had an over powering desire to cough. I counted sheep to divert my thoughts from this urge till it eventually died away. At 10.25 p.m. I heard a distinct sound in the jungle behind me. A faint rustle, then all was still. The minutes dragged by. Then it came again, on my right and in line with the very clump where I was sitting. Heavy breathing was clearly audible. A very faint grunt, silence, another grunt, and then the quick rush of a heavy soft body before me. Was it on the kill, or was it staring me in the face from the inky darkness, perhaps even at that instant drawing the powerful hind-legs below the supple belly to catapult itself upon me? And I could not see even the end of my own nose.

I had already cocked my rifle, and had slowly raised the muzzle, finger on trigger, to meet the coming onslaught at point-blank range. The perspiration poured down my face in sheer terror, and my whole body trembled with nervous suppression.

I depressed the torch switch and the brilliant beam blazed out upon a large hyena, standing above the kill, growling to find out it was a dead man that lay there. He stared blankly at the light for seconds and was gone. I could have laughed aloud with relief and the thought that I was safe once more at least for the present.

Anyhow, my position had been temporarily revealed and I could only hope the man-eater was not in the vicinity to become aware of it. Hastily I took advantage of the disturbance to swallow a mouthful of hot, refreshing tea from the flask I had brought, and quickly move my cramped limbs before resettling myself for the remainder of my vigil I was in Stygian darkness again, but considerably refreshed and relieved of the morbid nervous tension that had threatened to overcome me a few minutes before. At ten minutes to twelve I heard the moan of a tiger in the distance. This was repeated again at intervals of five to ten minutes, the last being at twelve-twenty, and from a spot I judged to be a quarter of a mile away. It was difficult to gauge the exact distance of sound in this densely wooded locality, but I thanked Providence and my lucky stars that the tiger had decided on making a noisy approach rather than the silent one I had dreaded.

A quarter of an hour slipped by without further sign. In ;he meantime the usual mid-nightly jungle-breeze had sprung up, to cause the bamboo stems to groan and creek against each other weirdly. This aroused a fresh and ominous thought in my mind. Supposing one of the several cut bamboo stems, balancing upright above my head was to become dislodged and slip downwards under its own weight. The cut end would impale me to the ground, like some rare beetle in a collector's box. The thought was not very pleasant and for a moment it eclipsed even the thought of the man-eater and its proximity.

And then I heard the crack of a bone on the cadaver lying in the darkness before me. Slowly I lifted the rifle to shoulder-level, steadied it and depressed the torch-switch for the second time that night. But nothing happened. I depressed the switch again and again, but still nothing happened. Undoubtedly the bulb had burnt out or some connection had come loose. I had now the choice of sitting very still till the tiger fed and departed, or changing my rifle for the smooth bore and attempting a shot. I quickly decided to use the gun. Ever so gently I lowered the rifle to ground level and then groped silently in the dark for the .12 bore. Finding it, I drew it towards me and then began maneuvering the weapon to shoulder-level. I could only hope that the tiger was looking away from me, or was too engrossed in his meal to notice all the movement that was going on in the midst of the bamboo-clump. And then misfortune befell me. Slightly, but quite distinctly, the muzzle of the gun came into contact with a bamboo stem and there was an audible knock.

The sounds of feeding stopped abruptly, followed by a deep-chested and rumbling growl. Hastily I got the gun into position and pressed the switch of the new torch. Luckily it did not fail, and the beam burst forth to show clearly a huge striped form as it sprang off the cadaver and behind the bamboo clump next to mine. From there a succession of earth-shaking roars rent the silence, as the man-eater demonstrated in no uncertain manner his displeasure at being disturbed, and his discovery of a human being in the near vicinity.

Keeping the torch alight, and a sharp lookout for his sudden attack, with one hand I groped for the spare bulb I always carried in my pocket. I extracted it and kept it on my lap. Still working with one hand, I unscrewed the cover of the torch on my rifle, extracted the faulty bulb and substituted the new one. Fortunately, the torch was one of those focused by adjustment from the rear and not the front end, and as the rifle torch was now functioning again, I extinguished that on the smooth bore, though I kept the gun ready across my knees for any further eventuality.

The tiger was still demonstrating, but had moved to a position in my rear. I knew I was safe enough, except from a frontal attack. To guard against this I would have to keep the torch alight continuously, but as over five hours still remained till daylight, there was the certainty the batteries would run low, even on both torches, if burned incessantly. So I switched off the light and relied on my hearing. When things became too silent for a long stretch, I would switch on the beam, expecting to see the creeping form of the tiger approaching me. But this did not happen and he kept his distance, demonstrating frequently till past 2.30 a.m., when I heard his growls receding in the distance. No doubt he was disgusted, but by this time I welcomed his disgust.

You may be certain I kept a sharp look-out for the rest of the night against the tiger's return, for the habits of a man-eater are often unpredictable; but the chill hours of early morning crept past without event, till at last the cheery cry of the silver-hackled jungle-cock made me grateful for the dawn and the light of another day, which on more than one occasion during the terrible hours that had just dragged by I had not thought of seeing. Scion the halloa of my followers from the bed of the Chinar River fell like music on my tired ears, and I shouted back for them to advance, as the coast was clear. With their arrival I staggered forth from my nightlong cramped position, to finish the tea that remained in my flask and to smoke a long-overdue pipe, while relating the events of the night.

All three of the men knew me most intimately, but although they did not say as much, it was clearly evident they were surprised to see me alive, for the roars and demonstrations of the frustrated man-eater had been clearly audible to them, where they had spent the night with the shivering herdsmen of Panapatti.

Byra now said that he would like to take a quick walk up the Chinar to Muthur, just four miles away, and fetch his hunting dog, which he felt would be of considerable help in following the trail of the tiger. This dog was a very non-descript white and brown village cur, answering to the most unusual name of Kush-Kush-Kariya. How it happened to possess this strange name I had never been able to fathom. In calling the animal, Byra used the first two syllables in a normal tone, but would accentuate the third into a weird rising cry resembling that of a night heron. I had never been able to emulate him in this, and had contented myself in the past with Kush-Kush alone, which the dog would obey without hesitation. Insisting that he at least took Sowree as company, I returned with Ranga to Ootaimalai and had a hot breakfast, and a bath in the Cauvery, followed by a long-overdue sleep. I awoke at 2 p.m. with the return of Byra, Sowree and the much-prized Kush-Kush-

Kariya, who wagged his tail at me in joyful recognition and nuzzled his cold snout against my shoulder.

Swallowing a hasty lunch and plenty of hot tea, we returned to the spot of my night's adventure, accompanied by the relatives of the dead man, who yearned to bring away his remains but were far too afraid to visit the spot unprotected. As may be imagined, the corpse was by this time smelling to high heaven, so they decided to carry it only as far as the Chinar River and bury the remains on the bank.

With their departure, poor Kush-Kush made a brave attempt to follow the cold trail of the tiger but was not very successful in going even 100 yards. Probably the stench that still pervaded the atmosphere and lingered on the quiet evening air had overpowered all faint smell that might have remained in the tiger's tracks over the hard ground. We returned to camp just before nightfall, a very disappointed group.

The following day nothing happened, but on the morning of the day after, Ranga nearly met his end. Each day, as I have already said, Byra, Sowree and I scoured the forest in opposite directions in the hope of locating the tiger, while it was Ranga's duty to feed and water our three baits, none of which had been killed up to that time. He had made an early start that morning, with another villager for company, and had already visited the bait at the well on Mundachipallam, which was found untouched, as expected. After depositing some of the straw carried by his companion, Ranga watered the animal and then the two men moved down Mundachipallam itself, to look to the second bait tied at its confluence with the Chinar River. The villager was leading, Ranga bringing up the rear. They had come about a mile from the road when, standing fifty yards from them in the middle of the dry stream, was the tiger.

The villager dropped his bundle of straw and shinned up the only tree at hand. For the few seconds it took him to climb a reasonable height, he blocked Ranga's progress, and within those few seconds the man-eater had reached the base of the tree, reared up on its hind legs, and with a raking sweep of its forepaw removed the loin-cloth around Ranga's waist, the end of which had hung downwards, while he climbed. The tiger halted momentarily to worry the cloth, while Ranga, minus his loin-cloth, climbed energetically, overhauling and almost knocking his companion off the tree, in his efforts to reach the higher terraces and safety. The disappointed tiger remained below, looking up wards and growling savagely, while Ranga and his companion shouted loudly for help, telling the world at large that they were being killed and eaten. Fortunately, a party of people, travelling in large numbers for

safety's sake, happened to be coming from Pennagram and were at that time in the vicinity of the well,

from where they heard the shouts and recognized its message. At the double the whole group, men, women and children of all ages, covered the remaining four miles to reach me at Ootamalai with the news. Not knowing it was Ranga who had been attacked, and Byra and Sowree not having yet returned, I jog-trotted the distance alone, arriving at the well in record time. From here I could plainly hear the shouting myself. By this time the tiger had left the foot of the tree and vanished into the forest, but the two men were afraid to descend, for fear it might be in hiding and rush forth on them. Hoping to surprise the man-eater, I refrained from answering them while hastening forward as swiftly as caution permitted. When I reached the tree, however, it was only Ranga and his companion who were surprised at seeing me, till I explained the circumstances. We then attempted to follow the tiger, but no signs of him were evident on the hard ground; so we desisted and turned back to visit the remaining baits. I accompanied the men, and we found both animals unscathed. It was past mid-day when we returned to Ootaimalai with the despairing knowledge that the leery tiger we were after apparently was not going to kill any of our baits. Nor, with the experience I had had with him, was he ever likely to return to a kill again. To say I was exceedingly crest-fallen and despondent would be putting it too mildly. The wily man-eater of Mundachipallam looked like being one of those tigers that would stay put for a long time to come, if it did not go away of its own accord to continue its depredations elsewhere. And then, about 7 a.m. two days later, came the event that brings this story to an end. As I have mentioned, in coincidence it remarkably resembled the events with which the tale started.

Again a group of persons, except that they were ten in numbers for the sake of safety, had placed their baskets, laden with fish for Pennagram, on the ground, to water at the well beside Mundachipallam and to rest awhile. Women being in the party, one of the men stepped behind the nearest tree to ease himself. There was a short roar, an elongated golden body with black stripes hurled itself as if from nowhere, and the squatter had disappeared. By good fortune, Byra, Ranga, Sowree and myself had set forth in company to visit our baits and were hardly a mile behind the party of ten. Soon we met the nine who were returning with the sad news of the one who was not. Running forward as fast as we could, we reached the well, where I whispered to Ranga and Sowree to climb up adjacent trees and await my further need. Byra and I crept forward and, behind the tree chosen by the unfortunate man to answer the call of nature, we picked up the

trail of his blood as it had ebbed away in the jaws of the tiger.

With Byra tracking, and closely in his wake with rifle to shoulder, and scanning every bush, we had penetrated only a short hundred yards when we heard the sharp snap of a bone in the mouth of the feeding tiger. The sound had come from a half-left direction ahead of us. Laying a restraining hand on Byra, I motioned him to remain where he was, while I crept cautiously forward knowing well that under such circumstances a companion becomes an additional life to care for.

The forest was still and breathless, and the sound of gnawing and crunching could now be heard more clearly. Very carefully and silently edging closer, with downcast eyes watching each footstep, for fear I should rustle a leaf, snap a twig, or overturn a loose stone, it took me a considerable time to advance a mere fifteen yards. From there I thought I could see the slayer, crouched on the ground. A few paces nearer, and suddenly he arose and faced me, a dripping human arm, torn off at the shoulder, held across his mouth. The wicked eyes gazed at me with blank surprise, then a snarl began to contort the giant face, rendered more awful by the gruesome remains it carried.

The 300 grains of cordite, behind the soft-nosed Winchester bullet, propelled the missile with upwards of thirty-five tons to the square inch, correctly into the base of the massive neck. The human arm dropped into the grass with a plop. The animal lurched forward with a gurgling grunt. Quick working of the under lever of the old, trusted rifle, and a second missile buried itself in that wicked heart. It beat no more. The man-eating tiger of Mundachipallam lurched forward to his end in almost the same spot where he had begun his wicked career months before. A large male, he was without blemish.

Undoubtedly a wicked tiger by nature, he had evidently turned man-eater through an unlucky chance. On such trivial circumstances often hang the threads of fate. Anxious about my welfare, my wife surprised me by arriving that same afternoon in her car from Bangalore to ask me whether I ever remembered I had a home and family, and if it was not about time I thought of returning to it.

We motored Byra, via Pennagram, back to his dugout near Muthur, where we were just in time to be present at the happy arrival of his fifth progeny. And the arrival was in this fashion. A shallow hole, hammock-shaped and about of the same dimension, had been scooped in the sands of the Chinar River, the hollow then being liberally filled with soft green leaves, freshly separated from their stalks. In this hammock the mother, about to give birth, lay when the pains of childbirth began. The

husband acted as midwife. No medicines, no ergot, no hot water, no cotton wool ! Only tender green leaves, and the sharp edge of a flint, to saw through the navel cord, the bleeding stump of which is staunched with ashes from an ordinary wood-fire. A couple of hours after giving birth the mother got up with her baby and went to the hole on the banks of Annaibiddahalla where they lived. The husband filled in the hammock-like hollow; leaves, placenta and all, with the loose sands of the Chinar River. In such simple and hardy fashion are the Byras of the forest born. So do they live and so do they die, true children of nature and of the jungle.

Long may they continue to exist, untrammeled and untarnished by civilization, happy and free to roam as they will over mountain, fen and forest glen, till death claims them and they return unostentatiously to mother earth, from which they have so unostentatiously sprung. On the morning of that day I had shot a peacock, and this we had for dinner, prepared in the jungle fashion. All feathers are removed, with the entrails, head and neck. Incisions with a knife are made in the flesh of the bird, into which are inserted salt, spices, cloves and 'curry-powder' to taste. The whole is then plastered over with fresh, clean mud from the riverbank to a thickness of well over an inch, so that it finally resembles a ball of wet muck. A fire of embers is built, the ball laced on It, and surrounded on all sides and above with still more embers. The fire is kept continuously alive by the addition of more wood, but the aim is to have glowing embers, rather than a blazing fire. After some time the mud begins to crack, and finally falls away in sections. Then is the time to remove the bird before it is burnt. With a little practice in the art of mud roasting, a truly superb roasted peacock or jungle fowl can be prepared for dinner, the finished product putting many a housewife to shame.

The Tigers of Tagarthy

Sham Rao Bapat and the tiger he shot in his own garden

IF you travel to the western limits of the District of Shimoga in the State of Mysore, you will at once be struck by the difference of scenery from that prevailing around Bangalore and the eastern parts of the State.

For here you are within the belt of evergreen forests, fed by torrential monsoon rains, averaging above 120 inches a year west of Shimoga town itself and reaching over 250 inches at the village of Agumbe, the extreme limit of Mysore State on the Western Ghats. Giant trees, their leafy tops reaching to high heaven, and colossal tree ferns, grow along the numerous streams that gush from forest and glen and border the roadside with a perennial supply of fresh water.

Vegetation of the rankest description, among which the thorny varieties of the jungles of central and eastern South India are conspicuous by their absence, is to be seen everywhere. But little wandering in these jungles is possible, for trails do not exist, since the undergrowth densely covers every open space and struggles ever upward to reach a ray of sunshine. Beneath the towering trees everything is damp and dark; the chirp of the wood cricket and croak of the bullfrog are the only sound you will hear. Leeches, their bodies attached to the undersides of leaves, stretch out elastically to fasten a grip on any living creature that may brush by. They will penetrate your clothing, worm their way between the interstices of your boots, putties or stockings, and suck your blood without your being aware of their presence, for they give you no pain, until, looking downwards, you will find some part of yourself oozing blood. Attempt to pull them off, and they will leave a nasty wound that generally festers into a sore. Apply a little of the common salt you should always carry on your person in these parts, or a little tobacco juice, and they will curl up and fall off of their own accord. The wound will then heal without any attention.

This is the home of the Hamadryad or King Cobra, 'Naia Hannah', as he is known, that giant snake of the Cobra family that reaches a length of fifteen feet and more. Dark olive green in color, with faint yellowish white circles around his body, he boasts of no visible mark on his dark, oval hood. Of amazing speed despite his great length, he feeds on other snakes, is aggressive and is said to attack on sight, a female guarding her young being reputed to be particularly bad tempered. I have twice met the King Cobra on his own grounds, once when collecting specimens for an aquarium of the beautiful red and green fish, spotted along their sides, which inhabit the forest streams outside Agumbe; and on another occasion, when out collecting orchids. But at neither time did they behave aggressively. Both specimens stopped upon seeing me, raised their heads about four feet above ground and partly extended their oval hoods while gazing at me attentively and inquisitively with their beady black eyes. Then they harmlessly glided on their way.

The higher treetops are the homes of beautiful orchids, the stick-

shaped branches of the Dendrobium family being particularly represented. In summer their clusters of pink, yellow, white or mauve blooms festoon the higher terraces in colorful array.

This district embraces the Shiravati River, whose waters fall gracefully and grandiosely in four distinct streams, a sheer 950 feet at the falls of Gersoppa or Jog. Here, on a moonlight night, can be seen that rare phenomenon against the steaming spray of the waters a rainbow by moon light.

The village of Tagarthy, eleven miles southeast of the little town of Sagar, is situated on the eastern limits of the evergreen forests, where they have been felled and cultivation has been undertaken. Because of the heavy rainfall and fertile earth, agricultural ventures in this area are extremely profitable. The grass also grows lusciously on the more open glades, and vast herds of cattle are kept in the bordering villages and hamlets, due to the abundant grazing.

Relatively few wild animals, beyond bison, inhabit the evergreen forests, owing to the denseness of the under growth and the presence of leeches and ticks, which annoy them. For the same reason, and due to the scarcity of game, carnivora are seldom encountered in those dark places. But as the area opens out, and the vast herds of cattle appear, carnivora collect in large numbers to feed on them and grow fat. Tagarthy was such an area, and at no one time in all my many visits were there less than four separate tigers in permanent residence. In February, 1939, the peak figure of my experience was reached, with eight cattle killed in one day at various points of the compass around Tagarthy. This indicated eight separate tigers operating, since the kills were reported from widely distant places.

Due to the number of tigers in the locality, panthers are rarely met with, the one or two eking out their existence doing so in the immediate vicinity of the villages, and living on dogs, goats and sometimes domestic fowls. For the tiger does not tolerate his smaller cousin and will with out compunction kill and occasionally eat him, if the panther gets within striking distance. Except for spotted deer, game is comparatively scarce around Tagarthy, and the tigers in that area are mainly cattle-lifters. Most of them are heavily built animals and fat, lacking the sleek, trim appearance of the true game killer.

Let me tell you the story of Sham Rao Bapat of Tagarthy. and of the tiger that he shot in his garden, quite close to his house. Sham Rao was but a lad at the time, about twenty-two years; but as the sole male heir, he managed the estate that surrounded his home with efficiency

and with the true love of an agriculturist. Rice grew in the lower, muddy areas, while the dry crop of ragi was cultivated on higher levels. He also had a grove of areca and cocoanut palms, up the stems of which clambered the betel-leaf vine. Moreover, Sham Rao had cattle and other livestock, and indeed was a prosperous landlord. One day a fat tiger decided to share in this prosperity and commenced killing Sham Rao's herd, one by one. Sham Rao possessed a smoothbore gun and nothing else, and loaded with ball, sat over the kills for the tiger's return. But for one reason or other, this never happened till it came to be surmised that this particular tiger was an old hand who had probably been shot at before and therefore would not return to his kill a second time.

And then the tiger grew bolder. One dark night it leapt the fence surrounding Sham Rao's garden and attempted to dislodge the stout bamboo screen that had been closely drawn across the entrance to the cattle shed. Sham Rao had wakened at hearing the restless snorting and stamping of his cattle. He had then detected a scratching sound and going outside met the tiger as it leapt away after having tried to force an entrance.

The next night Sham Rao placed small cut branches on the roof of his cattle shed, where he lay prone on his stomach, six feet above the ground at the entrance to his shed. This entrance had been closed. At ten o'clock the tiger presented itself and began scratching the door. Sham Rao fired both barrels of his smooth bore at point blank range, and the marauder sank almost noiselessly to earth. He was a fine example of the heavy type of cattle-killing tiger.

The scene changes. It was 11.30 a.m. and the sun shone brilliantly down on the little forest bungalow, situated some two and a half miles from Tagarthy itself. Early lunch was nearly ready, and my wife was busy with the few finishing touches. Just then a kakar voiced his grating call from the forest that bordered the bungalow fencing. Again and again the call was repeated, the excited note of the small deer betraying his intense alarm. Slipping on a pair of rubber boots and carrying the rifle, I crossed the forest fire line and penetrated the leafy depths of the jungle. The kakar was still calling and I went forward as fast as was possible, making the minimum of noise. I came upon a clearing, in the midst of which stood the little kakar facing away from me and voicing his intermittent bark. Slipping back into the jungle, I tiptoed around the clearing, careful not to place myself within the direct vision of the alarmed deer. Some teak trees had been planted here and their huge leaves, dry and brittle at this season, lay where they had fallen, carpeting the forest floor. I knew that to attempt to cross

them would be to give myself away. So I hid behind the trunk of a stout fig tree, growing on the edge of the teak and strove to penetrate the shadows under them. Stare as I could, for a while I saw nothing. Then a little distance away something stirred, and in doing so gave itself away. I focused my eyes on the spot and there I saw a tiger, lying unconcernedly on his back, all four feet in the air and apparently fast asleep. Periodically the tip of his tail would twitch, and it was this movement that had caught my eye and betrayed his presence.

It would have been unsportsmanlike to shoot the animal in his sleep. Besides he was doing no harm beyond killing his lawful food, and so I was not disposed to cause him any hurt. I leant my rifle against the tree and myself also, and for quite twenty minutes I watched that tiger sound asleep on his back. And then from the forest-lodge floated my wife's voice, calling me for lunch. The tiger heard it and sat up, turning his head towards the sound, his eyes still half closed with sleep.

Silently I stepped from concealment, the rifle ready for all eventualities. The tiger heard me, leapt to his feet and whisked around to gaze in blank surprise at this human, who had come so close to him undiscovered. Then with a lazy snarl he began to walk casually away. I let him go peacefully and soon he was lost to sight. On another occasion my wife and I. had hired a bullock cart, and had gone out at night shining torches, to see what we could see. We had travelled a mile and were halfway down a deep declivity, where the cart track crossed a stream, when she picked up a pair of eyes reflecting her torch-beam, deep in the jungle to our right. Halting our cart, we dismounted, she leading the way with the torch, with me behind with the rifle. The eyes had disappeared, so we followed a narrow footpath that led at an angle in the general direction of the spot where the eyes had been. Shortly we picked them up again, large reddish-white orbs, glowing distinctly against the background of night. Fortunately the undergrowth was thin just there and we were able to advance directly towards the eyes. A few steps further and out stepped a tiger, who looked at us and then back at the place from which it had just emerged. The mystery of this strange behavior was soon unraveled, for two cubs, the size of retrievers, broke cover and gamboled up to their mother.

She now gazed at us fixedly a few moments and then crossed into the jungle, uttering a low mewing sound, a call to the cubs to follow. They did so, and the trio were lost in the forest except for the rustle of the undergrowth that occasionally marked their progress through the bushes.

My wife kept her torch beam in the general direction where we could hear them moving, for fear that the tigress, resenting our intrusion, should change her mind and launch a flank attack. Then we both heard a distinct growl before us. Turning the beam towards this new sound, we were shaken at seeing another tiger, this time a large male, at almost the spot where the tigress had stood a few seconds before. Quite evidently we had come upon a family party returning from quenching their thirst at the stream. I might observe that it is quite unusual, however, for a male tiger to accompany a tigress with cubs of the size we had just seen. Generally she will not trust her offspring near her lord till they are fairly well grown.

The situation was now decidedly tense, as there was every possibility of one or other adult animal attacking us. My wife kept her head with commendable calmness, how ever, and the tiger, growling in a low tone, followed his family into the undergrowth.

At that time occurred an amusing sequel to the story, which might have had an unpleasant ending but happily did not. The unfortunate cart-driver, left alone in the dark, had heard the mewing of the tigress followed by the growl of her mate. Perhaps his bullocks then scented them, or even saw them, for suddenly they bolted with the cart, to rush pell-mell down into the bed of the stream, where the wheels stuck fast in the soft sand and water. Hearing the shouts of the cart man, and thinking he or his bulls had been attacked, we ran to the spot, to discover all was well except for the severe fright he had received. We were both glad that circumstances had not forced us to harm any of the members of that happy family party.

For some time my friend, Dr. Stanley of the Mysore Medical Service, was stationed by his department at Tagarthy, principally to attempt to stem the tide of malaria, which was rife and affecting practically every one of the inhabitants. The doctor was an enterprising man keen on shooting, and has shot quite a few tigers during his service.

Late one night he received a maternity call from a hamlet called Bellundur, about six miles away. True to his profession, he set forth by bullock-cart, armed with his bag of medicines, injections and bandages; his 'Geco' smooth bore and a five-cell torch added a touch of shikar to his duty.

They were traversing an intervening valley when a tiger leapt across the track, and sitting on its haunches by the wayside, turned to watch the passing cart. Stanley fired ball at the animal, which received the lead with a loud roar and disappeared.

Calmly he went on to his destination, relieved the mother of her baby and spent the rest of the night with the patient, returning next morning with a small boy of his acquaintance to help him and the cart man to follow up the tiger he had wounded the night before. Coming to the spot, they soon picked up a blood-trail, which they began to follow, the cart man turning back to his cart on the plea he could not leave his bullocks alone.

Stanley and the boy had gone some distance and entered a hollow, when they unexpectedly came upon the tiger lying on its side before them. Thinking it was dead, but to make certain, Stanley fired an L.G. into its rear, when the tiger came to life, turned round and charged them. As it leapt, Stanley fired his remaining barrel, this time ball, into the mouth of the tiger. Then it was on him, knocking him down and laying bare a portion of the back of his skull. At this moment the boy fled screaming, thus undoubtedly saving Stanley's life, for the tiger left him and chased the boy, whom in turn it sprang upon, biting into his side.

Dazed from the wound in his head, Stanley scrambled to his feet and fumbled to reload his gun, when, unexpectedly, the tiger left the boy and jumped into the jungle.

The youngster had been badly wounded in the back and side, and blood was bubbling out of the gaping holes made by two of the great fangs. In addition, three ribs were broken. Using his torn shirt for bandages, Stanley patched him up as well as possible and carried him to the bullock cart and the long journey of seventeen miles was begun to the town of Sagar, the doctor himself being in a bad way all the while. From there they entrained for Shimoga, about thirty-five miles away, where was a district hospital. It is sufficient to record that both of them recovered from their adventure, Stanley to receive a severe wigging from his medical superior, who reminded him he had been stationed at Tagarthy as a doctor and not to shoot tigers. Their fortunate escapes were undoubtedly due to the fact that the tiger had been severely wounded. Stanley's last shot into its mouth had very probably smashed the lower jaw, for it was noticeable that in both attacks there after it had used only its upper canines. Had the lower jaw been serviceable, there is no doubt whatever that both Stanley and the boy would not have lived to see another sunrise.

As it was, many villagers heard the wounded animal for a week thereafter, roaring night and day in agony. Then there was silence, and there is every likelihood that it crawled away into the depths of the forest to die, for the carcass was never found.

Stanley also told me of two other experiences at Tagarthy. Once while sitting on a machan over a kill, nearing sunset, a hamadryad climbed the tree in which he was stationed. He frightened it away; but as darkness descended, thinking the great snake might come back and feeling very uneasy, he returned to the village. On another occasion, while sitting imperfectly concealed over a kill, the tiger had seen him and had demonstrated all night until the early hours of morning, circling the tree and roaring continuously. This had become a nuisance, as a drizzle set in, but the good doctor, very wisely, had not risked returning alone in the dark when he had such an aggressive tiger to deal with.

When wandering in the few areas around Tagarthy where the forest is at all penetrable, I have myself come upon a three-quarter grown tigress lying dead in a clearing, with twenty-three porcupine quills embedded in her face and chest. One of them had completely penetrated and extinguished the right eye. The tigress was in an extremely emaciated condition. A few feet away was the half-devoured carcass of a panther. The tragedy was not difficult to piece together. Evidently the tigress had attempted to make a meal of a porcupine, which had charged backwards into her face, as these animals do, embedding its quills in her head and chest and putting out one eye. Blinded, starving and still carrying the quills from the last encounter, the tigress had wandered desperately in search of food. Then she had come upon the panther, whom she had attacked, fought, killed and begun to eat, when death had overtaken her, for some unaccountable reason, perhaps through stomach or other injuries caused by the panther itself, not clearly evident to me from her decomposed carcass.

In the hamlet of Bellundur lived a mysterious individual named Buddhia, accredited by local inhabitants with great powers of witchcraft and black magic. He was reputed to have bewitched people and brought about their deaths. He was a great friend of mine and, after one of our many intimate talks late one night he presented me with a circle of plaited creeper stems, four inches in diameter, made from mysterious plants that grow, he said, deep inside the forest. He asked me to keep this with me always, on my hunting trips, and said that if any time I was in an area where game did not show up, I was to wait till the sun had set, and then pass the circle three times up and down the barrel of my gun. Within twenty-four hours, he guaranteed, I would kill something with that weapon. I still have that circle, and am ashamed to confess have used it, more than once, where game has been scarce, in accordance with the directions of its giver. Call it coincidence or luck, as you wish, but it has never failed to produce results. Alas, old Buddhia is now no more, having succumbed to the dread scourge of malaria, from which even his powers of magic could

not protect him.

Now, let me tell you about the Tiger of Gowja. Gowja is another tiny hamlet, over six miles from Tagarthy, and half-way to the forest Chowki of Amligola, situated on the borders of the great tiger preserve of Karadibetta, care fully protected by His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore for his own shooting. Tigers are not so clever as to know that they should remain within the limits of certain boundaries. Most important of all, no cattle are permitted into the Karadibetta Preserve and tigers like eating cattle immensely. Just outside the hallowed precincts are cattle by the hundred, so what more natural than that there should be more tigers outside of the preserve than within it.

About 1938 a particularly enterprising tiger walked out of the preserve and started killing cattle around Amligola, returning afterwards to the preserve where he was safe and sound from molestation. In this manner he waxed fat, while his fame as a devourer of sleek cows spread through out the area.

Then, as happens with humans, continued success induced greater daring, disregard for consequences, and finally that rank carelessness and over confidence that brings undoing to both tigers and men. Our tiger had not yet reached this last stage, though he was well on the way, for he wandered farther and farther from the protecting fastnesses of Karadibetta and disdained to return there during the day-time, as had been his custom hitherto. In this way he came to Gowja, where he took up his temporary abode on the banks of a deep nullah that scored the countryside about a mile and a half from the hamlet. From this shelter he raided the cattle herds, harrying them morning and evening, never failing to kill at least two fat cattle each week.

Letters had been written to me about this slayer, but I had never bothered unduly about his activities, for after all tigers must eat to live and this old fellow was doing no harm to humans. A few less cattle mattered little to those vast herds.

With the passage of time, however, his daring increased still more, and the last reports showed that he was loath to leave his kills, demonstrating loudly by roaring and making short rushes at the herdsmen when they attempted to drive him off. True it was that hitherto he had not hurt anyone, but I knew from the preliminary indications that this would happen almost any day now. Sooner or later another man-eater would appear.

At 9.30 a.m. one morning, therefore, I alighted from the mail train from Bangalore at the wayside railway shed of Aderi. From here a walk of

three and a half miles brought me to Tagarthy. I was greeted by old friends and hospitably treated to coffee while a hot meal was being prepared. I occupied the time by gleaning all the news I could, but this did not amount to much beyond the usual account of the presence of tiger in all directions the daring old tiger of Gowja having earned particular notoriety. After the meal I set forth by can to cover the six odd miles to Gowja, which, because the track was in a very bad way, we did not reach till 6 p.m. While talking with the inhabitants, my tent was erected about three furlongs away, on the banks of a smaller nullah that fed the main stream. The tiger lived a mile or so beyond.

I was told that the tiger had killed two days before. Nothing had happened since, but the next kill was undoubtedly due within the coming forty-eight hours. Sure enough, word was brought at 1 p.m. next day that the tiger had just claimed another victim. Hurrying to the spot, I found the tiger had attacked a cow in the middle of an open field, quite 300 yards from the nearest cover, killed it and carried it away to its hiding place, which proved to be the very same nullah as that in which my tent was pitched. The soft sand of the nullah revealed tracks where the tiger had crept along the bed and then dashed over the bank towards the cow. The cow had run a short distance in an effort to escape, but had been over taken and slain. The tiger had then lifted the cow across its back and returned to the ravine, as was evident by the absence of any drag mark, though the tiger's pugs were firmer and had sunk deeper into the rough clods of the ploughed field, due to the weight he was carrying. I cautiously followed the tracks in the hope of encountering the animal or his kill. This I eventually did, but he did not demonstrate and show himself, as I expected he would. That indefinable sixth sense, which warns the jungle folk in the nick of time, evidently impressed this tiger that here was a human being to whom he should not show himself. While still some yards away in the undergrowth and in visible to me, he became aware of my presence, growled in a low tone and slunk away.

There was a suitable tree nearby and I arranged the erection of my charpoy machan. I was in position by 4 p.m. The tiger came at eight, but stood directly under my machan and beside the tree on which I sat. I knew of his approach by the subtle sound of his tread. No dry leaves crackled to betray his coming, but in the stillness of the silent night there was no mistaking that soft heavy footfall. He began to lick himself, his rough tongue running over his glossy coat, making the faintest of rasping sounds. Then he arose on his hind legs and began to clean and sharpen the claws of his forefeet against the bole of the tree. In so doing, he saw the machan above. A low growl and he was gone, nor did he return that night.

The following day nothing happened, so in the afternoon I tethered a heifer in the bed of the main nullah where he was reputed to have his abode and sat up on a machan in a tree overhanging the nullah at an angle of 60 degrees. I was in position at 3 p.m. At 5.30 p.m. I heard a dragging sound and there was the tiger hauling down the bank another cow he had taken from one of the herds. He was quite eighty yards away. Aiming at his neck, I fired, but as I did so the tiger moved forward, receiving the bullet much further back than was necessary for a fatal shot. He responded to the impact with a coughing grunt, catapulted to the bottom of the nullah, and was gone. I descended the tree, released my bait and returned to Gowja in the opposite direction, feeling confident I would locate and bag him next morning without undue trouble. But I was very much mistaken, as events were to show.

At dawn I was back at the scene of action, accompanied by two reliable locals from the hamlet. We picked up the tiger's blood-trail at the foot of the nullah, which traversed its bed for some considerable distance before climbing the opposite bank. We followed with every caution, but soon found that the animal had kept going, for there was no evidence that he had sat down to rest from his wound. It was almost two miles before he had eventually halted for the first time, feeling the effects of the bullet. He had then got up and continued, and I guessed that he was making for Amligola and the Tiger Preserve beyond. Once he reached this, I knew he was lost, since to carry firearms into the preserve, even in pursuit of a wounded tiger, was strictly prohibited. He had had a full night's start of us, and despite his wound it looked as if he might gain the sanctuary of the preserve after all.

Pressing forward, we came upon two more places where he had rested. At the first of these there was considerable blood, and the grass was flattened where he had been lying. At the second there was much less blood, and thereafter the trail became more difficult to follow. Evidently the flow of blood was stopping; perhaps the layer of fat beneath the outer skin had worked itself into the bullet-hole and had stopped the profuse bleeding. We soon found ourselves in the precincts of Amligola and I knew the tiger had now but a mile to go before reaching the forest fire-line that marked the western boundary of the preserve. Here fortune favoured us, for we encountered a stream, at that time holding pools of water. The pugs of the tiger on the soft sand showed that he had now changed his mind about heading for the preserve and had gone upstream instead in search of water. We followed and came upon the first pool, at which he had drunk and had lain up for quite a considerable time thereafter, for the tracks leaving this place were comparatively fresh and had been made within the

hour. This fact renewed our flagging hopes and we continued for a furlong before coming upon a second pool, where the tiger had also halted. Water still seeped through the indentations of the pugs, and it was now clear he was but a little distance ahead. He might even have heard us coming and had just moved forward. I determined to try strategy rather than follow in his wake, for I greatly feared that he might turn tail and bolt for the sanctuary which lay so close to this spot. Motioning to my two companions to climb into a tree, I ascended the bank of the nullah soundlessly, and doubled forward in a detour as hard as I could go, parallel to the line of the nullah. I rejoined the nullah half a mile down its course and tiptoed backwards in the hope of surprising the tiger.

But I was doomed to disappointment, for he heard or saw me and scampered up the bank and towards the preserve, as I had feared. I followed his blood-trail to where he had entered a patch of dense scrub, which I circled, halting behind the trunk of a tree at the far end. Here I waited, but nothing emerged. If I attempted to summon my men I would alarm the tiger, and I was in a quandary as to what to do next. Very obligingly he provided the solution by moving, as I noticed the grass before me wave to his forward motion, although not a glimpse of his body was visible. The grass continued to wave as he crept away at an angle, so I left my protecting tree and stole forward myself. The grass began to thin then, and at last I saw him, just as he saw me.

I fired at his flank and with a roar he charged. But within five paces his courage failed and he turned to receive a third shot, which took him pell-mell into the thicket from which he had just emerged. I whistled to the men, who had heard the shots and were themselves bravely coming forward. When they had joined me I explained the situation and told them to climb to the tops of the neighboring trees in an effort to locate the tiger. This they did, but signaled that they could see nothing. I then posted them up two separate trees about fifty yards apart, after telling them to whistle if they saw our quarry, and returned to the nullah myself, in case the tiger should have gone back.

It was a nasty business negotiating that narrow ravine, not knowing at what moment the tiger might spring upon me from the bank above or from behind one of the boulders, which strewed its course. One of the fundamental principles in following a wounded tiger is never to negotiate the bed of a stream alone, when the wounded animal might be lurking above. But I was desperate, having spent the whole day in following this wounded beast, and feared that yet, at the last moment, it might escape me by dragging itself away to die in Karadibetta.

So with bated breath and rifle cocked, and with my finger closed around trigger, I negotiated that stream, to find the tiger had not recrossed it and was still inside the thicket into which it had jumped. How to dislodge him was now the problem.

Returning and summoning the men, we held a council of war. To follow the tiger into the midst of the thicket without knowing at least its approximate location would be suicidal. And then came inspiration. Returning to the stream, I removed my shirt, knotted the sleeves together and tied up the neck. Using it as a bag, we filled it with pebbles to breaking point. Then one of the men carried it back to where I had last fired at the tiger. With this store of ammunition, we began stoning the thicket in all directions, till at last we were answered by a warning growl from the bushes to the right of the point where we stood and about thirty yards away.

Evidently the tiger was severely wounded and could not move, for he did not rush out at us but continued to answer each stone that fell near him with a series of growls. Whispering to the men to stone intermittently to hold his attention, I made a detour of the thicket and began to enter it from the direction of the nullah. I could hear the tiger growling before me, and the occasional fall of the river stones that were hurled by my henchmen. As long as I could hear the tiger I made progress, although the thicket was dense, for I knew his attention was otherwise held. But then, as I drew nearer, he heard me, for his growling stopped. My followers also noticed this and guessed that he had heard or sensed my approach from the rear. In an effort to distract him they threw the stones higher, further and faster, but without result, for the tiger would not give himself away.

I knew I would have to be extremely careful, as he might now attack me at any moment. I halted, every sense alert, straining my ears to hear the faintest rustle preliminary to the last great bound that would bring him upon me. Nothing happened, and as the seconds rolled by in silence, broken only by the sound of the dropping stones, my nervous tension mounted and I became oppressed by an overpowering sense of impending danger. I glanced in all directions, but could detect no movement. I strained my ears, but could hear nothing. Still that sense of approaching peril grew stronger and stronger, till I could have shouted aloud to break the unnatural silence, or have turned tail and run.

And then I glanced behind me. There between two bushes was the wounded tiger, reddened with its own blood as it crawled on its belly to surprise me with its last great spring. Our eyes met it roared and

launched itself into the air, while the Winchester cracked twice, hurling its powerful bullets right into the face of the oncoming fury. I sidestepped as the heavy body crashed before me, kicked wildly in the air and then lay still, as I sped yet another bullet into its heart at point-blank range. The troublesome old tiger of Gowja had failed to reach the sanctuary of Karadibetta and was now no more.

About the Author

Kenneth Anderson (1910-1974) was an Indian writer and hunter who wrote many books about his adventures in the jungles of South India.

Kenneth Anderson hailed from a Scottish family settled in India for six generations. His father was superintendent of the F.C.M.A. in Poona and dealt with the salaries paid to military personnel, having an honorary rank of captain. His father also had a rifle and often hunted for waterfowl. Even though his father was not a hunter of man-eating carnivores, he was the person who had the most influence on Anderson's decision to become a professional hunter.

Kenneth Anderson did his schooling in Bishop Cotton School, Bangalore and then at St Joseph's College. He worked for many years at the post office and during the war at the Hindustan Aircraft Factory as a superintendent in the blueprint and planning department. He lived in a bungalow not far from Queen Victoria's statue at the head of the South Promenade (called Mahatma Gandhi Road today) and also owned some land near Bannerghatta, today a suburb of Bangalore.

His love for the inhabitants of the Indian jungle led him to big game hunting and eventually to writing real-life adventure stories. He would often go into the jungle alone and unarmed to meditate and enjoy the beauty of untouched nature. As a professional hunter, he searched out man-eating big game to eliminate the threat they posed to villages. Some of his most notable kills include the Sloth bear of Mysore, the Leopard of Gummalapur, the Leopard of the Yellagiri Hills, the Tigress of Jowlagiri, the Tiger of Segur and the Tiger of Mundachipallam.

His books are hailed as classics of jungle lore. His style of writing is unassuming, descriptive and engaging as he talks about his adventures with many wild animals. While most stories are about hunting tigers and panthers (or leopards) - particularly those that were man-eaters - he also includes chapters on his first-hand encounters with dangerous elephants, bison, and bears. There are also stories about the less 'popular' creatures like Indian wild dogs, hyenas, and snakes. He takes pains to explain the habits and personalities of these animals.

Anderson also gives valuable insights into the people of the Indian jungles of his time, with their lush green woods teeming with

wildlife and local inhabitants having to contend with poor quality roads, communication and health facilities. His books delve into the habits of the jungle tribes, their survival tactics, and their day-to-day lives.

Besides focusing on Indian wildlife, he also explores the subject of the occult and writes about his live experiences with unusual phenomena (for which he has no explanation). He helped to save the dwelling jungle tribes from the horrors of man-eaters in many villages in the south Indian states. He also was well versed in speaking Kannada, the language of his hometown Bangalore, and also spoke Tamil, the language spoken in the neighboring states to some extent. He had a Studebaker car and usually used a .405 Winchester rifle for hunting. Despite his reputation as a hunter, he was a pioneer of wildlife conservation in southern India, and spent his later years "shooting" with a camera.

IN LOVING MEMORY
OF
OUR DEARLY BELOVED
KENNETH DOUGLAS STUART ANDERSON
(JOCK-SCOTCHIE)
BORN 8-3-1910
DIED 30-8-1974
GOD'S WILL WAS DONE WE HAD TO PART
TO END YOUR SUFFERING AND YOUR PAIN
WE SHALL REMEMBER IN OUR HEARTS
YOUR VALIANT FIGHT BUT ALL IN VAIN
AUTHOR AND FRIEND TO ALL THE WILD
ANIMALS AND LITTLE BIRDS
THE ROCK ON WHICH WE ALL LEANT

Grave of Kenneth Anderson at of St Patricks' cemetery, hosur road, Banglore

Books

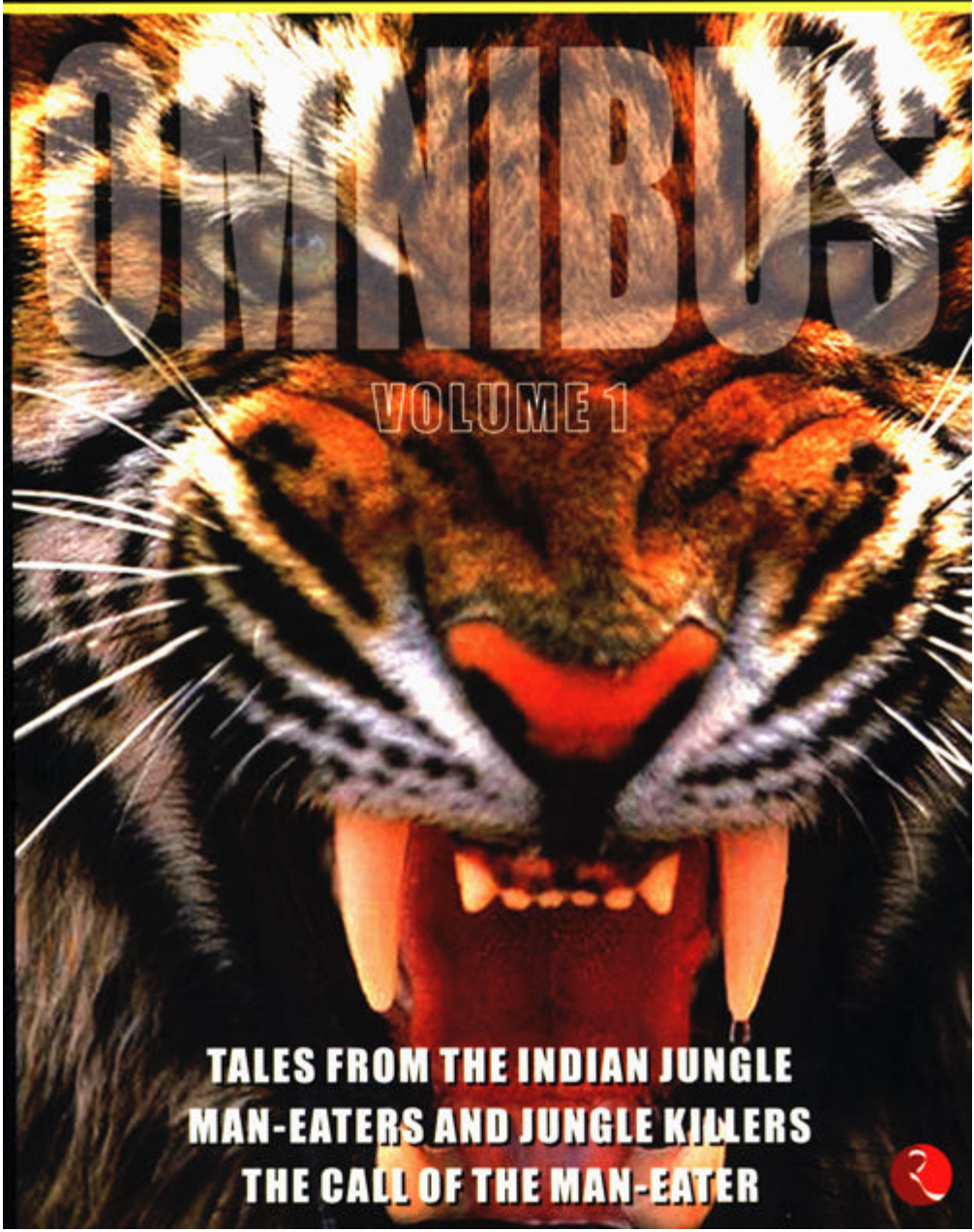
Anderson's books are fairly popular, and recently two omnibuses of his work have been published. The following is a list of the books written by him:

- Nine Man-eaters And One Rogue (1954)
- The Black Panther of Sivanipalli and Other Adventures of the Indian Jungle (1959)
- Jungles Long Ago
- Man Eaters and Jungle Killers
- Tiger Roars
- Tales from the Indian Jungle
- This is the Jungle
- The Call of the Man Eater

In addition to the themes of adventure and survival, Anderson also expounds on his love for India, its people, and its jungles. He was a firm believer in the power of alternative medicine and always carried a box containing various kinds of natural herbs from the jungle with him. Anderson died of cancer at the age of 64. He is buried in St Patricks' cemetery in Bangalore.

THE END

The Kenneth Anderson

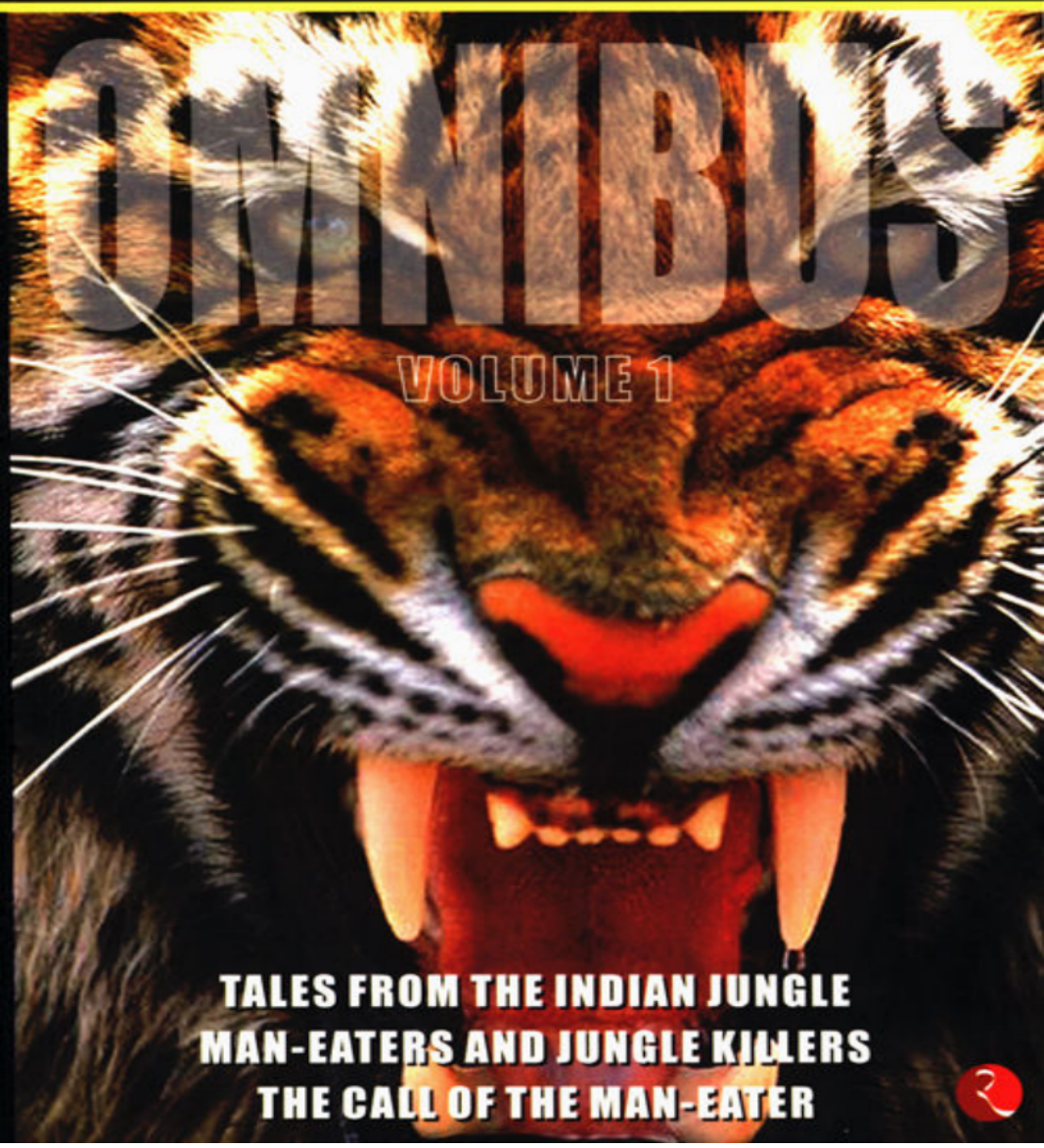


OMNIBUS

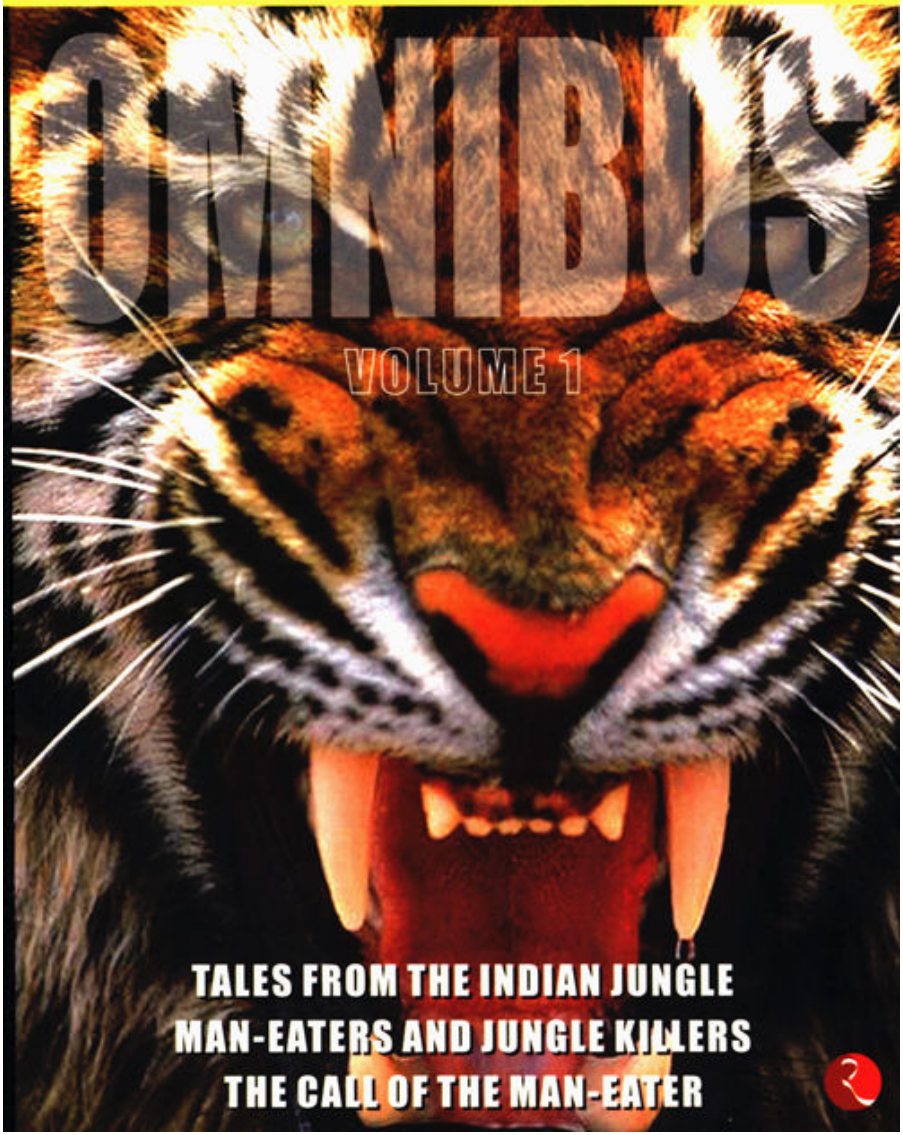
VOLUME 1

TALES FROM THE INDIAN JUNGLE
MAN-EATERS AND JUNGLE KILLERS
THE CALL OF THE MAN-EATER

The Kenneth Anderson



The Kenneth Anderson



The Kenneth Anderson Omnibus

KENNETH ANDERSON

Volume -I

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Tales from Indian Jungles

Introduction

The man sits with his back to a tree and the light from the campfire waxes and wanes, throwing him into sharp relief along with the tree-trunk against which he rests, to fade the next instant into obscurity and gloom. Leaning against the tree beside him is a .405 Winchester rifle of ancient vintage.

Someone throws a fresh log on the flames and myriad sparks soar upwards, lighting the heavy boughs of the great tree that overshadows the camp. For an instant the man's countenance, too, is lit brightly and we see that he has a beard and moustache, and that firmly held in the corner of the mouth is an old briar that has long gone out. A battered 'Gurkha' hat, its brim curled up at the left side, slopes rakishly to the right upon his head.

The man is speaking. He appears to be telling a tale and it is clear that he is so intent upon it, so absorbed, that he has forgotten his pipe and all else around him.

The flames die down, then flare up again, their momentary gleam revealing the absent look in the man's eyes, as he lives again the incidents he describes. The past has become so real that he is oblivious of his audience, squatting around him on the ground beside the fire, listening to his words.

The sparks fly upwards to merge, fade and disappear in a thick spiral of smoke that curls yet higher until it is lost in the gloom of the heavy foliage of trees that encircle the camp and accentuate the jungle night.

Except for the crackle of the flames and the drone of the man's voice, the forest is lost in silence, and a heavy, oppressive, uncanny quiet that we feel cannot last much longer. And we are right. The roar of a tiger breaks suddenly through the blackness, to be answered by the scream of an excited elephant. Aungh-ha! Ooongh! Aungh-ooongh!' comes that awful sound as the tiger stalks boldly down the jungle aisles, while the distant trumpeting of the elephant 'Tri-aa-a-ank! Tri-aa-a-ank!' announces that the challenge has been met.

But the man seems not to hear these sounds, so engrossed has he

become in the story he is telling. He appears to be of the jungle himself, and we get the impression that he belongs there. This is home for him and here is the place he would want to die; the jungle is his brithplace, his haven and his resting place when the end comes.

Let us give heed, then, to what he tells. Stories of the denizens of the forest; tales of incidents, macabre and ghostly sketches of himself. The man seems happy as we listen and he warms to his theme.

For he loves to speak about the jungle and its people, and who should know that better than I.

For I am that man!

One

Ghooming at Dawn

The poojaree awakens us with his persistent soft calls of *'Dorai, Dorai; yeancheko, knarl munni agadho!;'* meaning, 'Master, master; wake up, it's four o'clock!'

He whispers the words into our ears, first mine and then yours; for to touch either of us with his hands would be considered disrespectful. Have not the poojarees, for as long as man can remember, been regarded as outcasts, whose very proximity to any ordinary person—let alone their touch—is abhorrent in the extreme?

We sit up abruptly, for in the jungle a tardy awakening may spell the difference between life and death, to view the glowing embers of the fire whose light barely extends to the trunks of the giant trees of the forest that hem us in on three sides. On the fourth we see a whole stretch of water, lit by the stars, which is the Cauvery river, and we hear the dull rumble as the flood swirls past us, appearing out of the darkness of the jungle night and vanishing just as swiftly.

We are camped in the open upon the river bank, a few yards from the fringe of the forest and only a short distance from the water's edge. The poojaree has remained awake all night, to stoke the fire that protected us while we slept from an unwelcome visit by some wandering elephant that might have come for a drink, or perhaps an unusually daring crocodile. The sands of the river bank on which we have been sleeping have been a deterrent to our smaller but equally unpleasant foes such as snakes and scorpions, who do not like crawling on such a surface.

We throw off our light coverings, for it is comparatively warm. The heat from the embers has helped to protect us from the dew. I place a small kettle of water on the fire to brew some tea, that ever-refreshing drink that is always welcomed by persons who sojourn in wild places, and while the water boils accompany you the few paces to the water's edge for a quick wash of teeth, face and hands.

By the time we return, the kettle is boiling, and soon we sit with a steaming mug in hand, while cold buttered *chapatties* and some ripe bananas—called plantains in India—a complete breakfast, unfit for kings perhaps, but of which there is no equal for good health.

This brief meal is soon over, and now we attend to the rifles that we are going to carry on this early-morning 'ghoom' of the foothills that start less than a quarter-mile away and rise steadily and culminate in a peak called Ponachimalai, over 5,000 feet high and

about six miles distant as the crow flies.

My silent, but trusted friend and companion over many years and through many adventures, a somewhat battered .405 Winchester of which everybody makes fun, needs little or no attention. Like me, it is an old-timer that seems to look after itself. In any case, it appears very inferior to that 10-shot U.S. 3006 Springfield rifle of yours, which you rightly treat with such care.

It is still dark when we leave camp. Our poojaree companion is eager to accompany us, but as we are embarking upon a prowl during which I would like to try to show you a few interesting things, I decide to leave him behind on the pretext of looking after the few possessions we have brought. A hunter, pure and simple, Byra, our poojaree friend, would greatly disapprove of my pointing out to you some grand old sambar stag instead of shooting it; while if I draw your attention to the mother-love of a spotted doe, offering herself as a target in an attempt to shield her fawn, he would be positively annoyed with me for not pulling the trigger and bagging both mother and fawn.

The air becomes chill within a hundred yards, and seems to grow even colder as we start to climb the sloping ground to the summit of the first foothill.

It is still dark and we progress slowly. Stumbling over stones and brushing through the undergrowth will certainly betray our movements and turn the first phase of our little walk into a failure. For it is the season when the *jumlum*- tree casts its purple fruit so prolifically over the ground, and this astringent delicacy is an article of diet absolutely irresistible to sloth bears, who will cover miles in a night to visit such a tree. Only yesterday I noticed a grove of these *jumlums* close to the riverside and barely two furlongs from camps, with the tracks and droppings of many sloth bears that have been visiting them each night to feed upon the fallen purple fruit.

The hillock we are now ascending is adjacent to the grove and will form the direct line of retreat for the sloth bears that will be still gorging there. As is their custom, they will begin to make for rising ground as soon as the false dawn breaks. That time is close upon us now, and a momentary lightening of the sky heralds this curious phenomenon.

But within a few minutes a pall of darkness once again envelopes the land, till a wider spreading glow in the eastern sky, perhaps twenty minutes later, announces the true dawn and the beginning of another day.

This false dawn deceives not only the hunter new to the forests, but the inmates of the jungle as well. Junglecocks begin to crow, peafowl awaken to voice their brassy calls, carnivores on the prowl

turn back to the lairs, and the hyenas and jackals that have been sneaking after them in the hope of a meal from what is left of their kills, turn back to their burrows in the ground and under the rock, where they shelter during the day.

The grumpy and greedy sloth bears that have been concentrating their energies on gormandizing the fallen *jumlums* will also be deceived by the false dawn. Reluctantly they will abandon the few fruits they have been unable to force down their throats and will make for the haven of the hillsides where they will be left in peace, there to spend the hot hours of noontide sound asleep in some cave or grassy hollow in the ground, or perhaps beneath the shade of a gnarled old tree.

But we ourselves are not misled and hasten to take up our positions before the short-lived glow lapses into pre-dawn darkness. We should be in hiding if we are to hear the sloth bears' approach and perhaps glimpse one of them in the light of the true dawn when it breaks. It would never do to be surprised in the murk of that short-lived twenty-minute interval.

The sloth bear shares with its relatives of all lands the evil reputation of being irascible, excitable, resentful and aggressive should one stumble upon him unexpectedly. Scores of jungle dwellers in India carry horrible scars because they happened to encounter a sloth bear coming round a corner or floundered upon one sound asleep. Many have lost eyes and noses under their raking talons.

This rock, which we have come upon, will suit our purpose admirably. It is about four feet high by perhaps six long. Both of us can crouch behind it and await the coming of a bear. It is, of course, just a chance that may or may not come off, for after all the bears have the whole jungle to roam in and there must be many other *paths* and byways by which they could climb the hillock without passing in this particular direction.

We chance our luck and wait in silence for a few minutes, hearing only our own breathing. Then the faint thud of a stone, somewhere at the base of the hillock, raises our hopes. Only an animal, generally clumsy in its habits or in search of the grubs that hide under such stones, would have betrayed its presence by making such a noise. Decidedly not a deer, for it would be afraid; and certainly no tiger or panther would advertise its passing. The other possibility might be an elephant. This we will know in a few moments.

Now we can hear the sound of laboured breathing, as if some old man is climbing the hillock with great difficulty. This removes any doubt that a sloth bear is indeed approaching sniffing at holes under the rocks and at the roots of bushes in search of grubs and other succulent morsels.

The eastern sky is beginning to brighten with the approach of the real dawn, but it is still dark behind the rock where we crouch, when the bear reaches us. You are to my right, and the bear is to the right of you, maybe ten feet away. I press your arm tightly and you understand my unspoken signal to remain motionless. It might not see us, for it is notoriously short-sighted. It is also very deaf. It might attack should we betray our presence, and we do not want to shoot it, for normally a bear does us no harm.

The snorting and the grumbling, the huffing and snuffing pass. All we can glimpse is a black blur against the bushes; then the bear has disappeared as it ascends the hill and the sounds of its progress grow fainter.

The dawn breaks apace and the sky to the east across the river displays a pattern of ever-changing colour, starting from dark grey and deep purple and trailing off into violet, green, blue, orange and vermillion, till at length the sun's rim rises above the jagged heights of distant mountain peaks. Its diffused rays are not yet bright enough to keep us from staring with unshielded eyes at that glorious fiery ball.

In salute, birds large and small, far and near, burst into song. The twittering of a hundred *bulbuls,* the call of the black-and-red crow-pheasant, the cry of a brain-fever bird rising to crescendo, fall upon our ears from the hillside, while from the heavy cover by the river we hear the challenge of junglecocks, 'Wheew! Kuck-kya-kya-k'huckm,' and the metallic notes of a far off peacock 'Miaoo! Miaoo!'. We can imagine it with the glorious plumes of its tail spread like a large fan, strutting and dancing before a bevy of admiring hens.

Crack-a-a-ack! We hear the sound but once, rather faint but quite unmistakable. Something heavy is coming up the hill, perhaps another sloth bear, but I think not. Bears are continuously noisy, while this animal, except for that initial accidental sound, is otherwise, silent.

We crouch quietly behind the rock with just the tops of our heads and eyes showing. To remain absolutely still is the first secret of successful concealment in the jungle. Even if an animal sees you, it will not be able to make you out provided you remain absolutely motionless. The second factor, of course, is the direction in which the wind is blowing. The sense of smell rather than of sight is far more developed in most wild creatures, particularly members of the deer family. Provided the wind is not blowing directly from you to the quarry, and provided you remain absolutely still, you have a good chance of ambushing practically any animal successfully.

We put this to the test a moment later when the bushes before us part with a faint rustle to reveal the head and shoulders of an enormous sambar stag. His giant antlers are spread in perfect symmetry, and he is near enough for us to see their gnarled thickness,

equal to your forearm, at the base.

The stag is closer to us than the sloth bear was a moment earlier, and directly in front, yet he does not see us. He hesitates cautiously before advancing into the clear space on the other side of the rock behind which we are hiding. Then he steps forth and we see his massive body in all its grandeur.

He is an old animal, as revealed by his dark brown colour, the shagginess of the mane around his neck, and the long coarse hair on his flanks, which is not quite thick enough to cover completely the skin on his sides. These factors and the massiveness of his antlers indicate the stag's advanced age.

Now I will show you how inquisitive a sambar can be. Plucking a thick stem of grass at my side, I allow the plumed end to protrude above the rock, while holding the stem between finger and thumb. Then I begin to twirl it around and the effect on the stag is instantaneous. Soundless and slight as is this movement, it registers on those ever-watchful eyes. He stops abruptly, his two large ears flicking forwards and backwards, and then forwards again. Impatiently he raises his right leg bent at the knee-point, and stamps it hard upon the ground. His hoof makes a metallic click against a stone.

The stag repeats this action while staring harder than ever at the stem of grass which I continue to revolve. All his suspicions are aroused now as his instinct warns him that something strange is going on. He has seen stems of grass many a time swaying in the breeze. But never has he seen one twirling round and round!

We can read the stag's thoughts behind those staring eyes. Instinct alerts him and urges him to flee. But curiosity impels him to find out more about the stem of grass that twirls around in such a peculiar fashion. The sambar takes a step forward, hesitates for a full minute, and then comes forward again. Every muscle in his frame is taut, attuned to flee at a moment's notice; but he just cannot overcome his inquisitive urge.

This natural inquisitiveness among the deer and antelope families is the reason why thousands of them are slaughtered each year by experienced poachers, who do just what I am doing at the moment, or adopt some other trick to entice them to their doom. The stag is so close now that he could be transfixed by a spear-throw; and he is coming even closer! Clearly this foolish animal must be taught a salutary lesson and I decide to give him the fright of his life.

Springing up from behind the rock, I yell' Wroff! Wrooff! Wrooff!' at the top of my voice. To say that the stag is taken aback by this sudden apparition of a human with a tiger's voice describes the situation mildly. He rears up on hind legs, slips on a stone, falls to his knees, struggles erect and lets out a strident cry of danger.

'Oo-onk!' he screams.

Then he lays his antlers back along his sides so as not to get them caught in the branches of trees, and crashes down the hillside. So precipitate is his flight that we can follow his movements by the rattle of displaced stones till he reaches the shelter of the heavy forest beside the river. There the stag evidently halts to see if he is being pursued, and resumes his warning to all the jungle that danger and death lurk upon the hillside.

'Oo-onk! Dha-ank!' he bellows, again and again.

The general excitement is taken up by the watchman of the band of langur monkeys that have been feeding contentedly in the *jumlum* - grove. We can just glimpse him from where we hide, standing erect on two legs on a tree-top as he strives hard to catch sight of the danger that the sambar has announced. Try as he may, he cannot see us. Obviously he is puzzled and wants to identify the nature of the foe. Then the big male langur decides he must do his duty to his band and the other wild creatures at large by joining in the alarm and passing on the warning.

'Harr!' he screams gutturally; and then a moment later, 'Harr! Harr-harr!' in quick succession. The forest is disturbed in right earnest now, and from the far side of the river a jungle-sheep, about to quench his thirst, takes fright, scampers away and voices his dog-like bark as he goes, 'Kharr! Kharr! Kharr!'

A herd of spotted deer, grazing somewhere on the other side of the hillock on whose slopes we are hiding, hears the commotion and passes on the warning. 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!' call the hinds to each other in quick succession. In the distance an elephant trumpets shrilly.

The excitement dies down at length and we decide to resume our early-morning prowl, for there is nothing to be gained by continuing to hide. The sambar has made too great a commotion for anything further to come our way.

Do you see that shrub with the tapering leaves resembling the tea-plant that thrives only in higher altitudes? Many such bushes grow all around. It is known as the 'vellari' plant. The leaves, in a compress or poultice form are very useful in relieving rheumatic pains and swellings of any sort. The five-pointed leaves of this large tree, green above and silver-white below, produce excellent effects when applied to raw wounds or a contusion; the silver-white side is placed in contact with the troubled area. That little plant that grows on the hard ground, barely a foot high, with the silver-grey, almost spiked leaves, is said to be a remedy for poisonous snakebites, and that other tiny plant with white, daisy-like flower and the serrated leaves, is renowned for stopping bleeding where the juice from the leaves is squeezed into a wound. It also lowers high blood pressure in a patient

as rapidly as can any medicine prescribed by a doctor.

Truly the jungle is filled with all manner of herbs and plants whose leaves, stems, seeds, flowers and even roots are remedies for most of the maladies from which the human race suffers. They grow in the forests and also in civilized areas, even along the railway track.

You must often have noticed the myriads of pink and white flowers peeing out from among the green leaves of the common Indian periwinkle shrub that thrives practically everywhere, particularly on railway embankments. Forty leaves of this plant, brewed like tea and drunk in a large cupful of water or milk every day, stimulates the pancreas by helping the secretion of insulin, thus controlling diabetes. But there are other roots and leaves that are even more effective in treating this malady, one of them a little creeper common in every jungle. It is known as the 'sugar killer' because, after chewing only one leaf, sugar loses its sweetness and tastes like sand in the mouth, this effect lasting for about three hours.

But we are digressing and in the meanwhile have arrived at the top of the hillock and begun our descent on the other side. We must move cautiously now, for in places the going is steep, and should one of us dislodge a stone or make some noise, the family of spotted deer that has now stopped calling and that we hope to see soon, will surely take alarm. Luckily the breeze is blowing up the hill, so they will not scent us.

We reach the base of the hillock and tread our way around bushes of thorn and lantana on tiptoe till we arrive at a grassy glade. There, feeding placidly, is a herd of at least forty of the deer we had hoped to find. Fortunately, none of the hinds on sentinel duty have observed our approach and we stop just in time behind a crop of young redwood trees.

The sight before us is magnificent. The stags are in the centre of the group, antlers spread and tapering, as they toss their proud heads and sniff the air before stooping to graze again. Around them on all sides are the does and fawns, the former ever alert, with ears cocked forwards and twitching to catch the faintest sound. Now and then a head and neck dips quickly to earth to grab a mouthful of grass or leaves, but is raised again quickly, ever observant, always vigilant.

The fawns have no such responsibilities and death will strike many of them down cruelly and suddenly, before the survivors learn that the great secret of continued existence in the jungle is to be 'ever watchful at every moment; for death lurks everywhere.'

They gambol and play among themselves, one chasing the other round and round. A few of the very young members nuzzle up against their mothers, slyly dipping their tiny heads under udders hanging temptingly close, to sneak a drink of milk. The mothers in turn stop

their feeding now and again to lick their little offspring affectionately, but never for a moment do they halt their close scrutiny of the surrounding jungle for a possible foe. Their eyes seem to stare in every direction, with ears strained forwards to catch the slightest sound, and nostrils dilated to detect the faintest scent of danger.

On a tree directly above the grazing deer is a small family of langurs. Two of these jump to earth and playfully chase a spotted fawn. Then one leaps back to a low branch where, hanging by its legs, it grabs the fawn by the tail and half lifts if off the ground. The fawn enjoys the game but its mother does not seem to approve.

A scene apparently of utter peace, beauty and tranquillity. But out of the corners of our eyes we notice the faintest of movements beneath a large bush, well away to our left. We look harder at the bush, but the movement has now ceased.

A hind with her young fawn, grazing close to that bush, has seen it too. She raises her head abruptly to stare hard, both ears cocked forwards and muzzle aquiver. The she raises her right foot to stamp the ground and voice the first syllable of her warning cry, Aiow!'

But it is already too late. An elongated form, golden and spotted in the rays of the early morning sun, springs from under that bush and in two bounds reaches the little fawn. In the next second it is dead, while the panther glowers and growls over the small quivering body.

Then we witness a scene that is as touching as it is magnificent. The fawn's mother, forgetful of her own safety, rushes forward to defend it. The panther leaves the little carcass and springs upon the hind, seizing her throat and bearing her to the ground. Her hoofs drum out their death-agony on the green grass, already stained a deep red by the blood that flows from her torn throat.

I watch you as you raise your 10-shot Springfield to cover the still growling panther, in order to exact what you feel is just retribution for the murder that has just been done. But I stretch out a hand to hold the muzzle and deflect your aim.

'Don't shoot, John! It's the law of the jungle. The panther has killed for food, not wantonly.'

The panther hears my voice, then sees us. In the next instant it has vanished. But it will come back.

Two

The Bellundur Ogre

Bellundur is a hamlet situated on the shoulder of a hill and about three miles from the village of Tagarthy, in the district of Shimoga, in Mysore state.

For centuries this part of Mysore has been the home of tigers, which had become so numerous as to have almost eliminated, simply by devouring them, their lesser cousins, the more subtle but far less powerful panthers that also, not long ago, roamed in large numbers through the area. These lesser cats, as a matter of fact, had created havoc in their time. Far bolder and more clever, and more difficult to circumvent, they could hide themselves better, being smaller than tigers; they haunted the precincts of villages which they raided systematically each night after sundown, carrying away fowls, dogs, goats, sheep and calves with equal disdain and impartiality.

Humans they seldom harmed unless they were wounded, but on those rare occasions when they were guilty of this crime, to exact retribution against them was difficult because of the cover afforded by the dense jungles of the area, well watered as they were by heavy monsoon rains.

When my story opens, however, tigers were the ruling factor, while in Bellundur lived a necromancer who was reputed for his ability to provide charms and talismans of all sorts for all purposes. These last were said to be particularly efficacious in procuring a loved one, or contrarily, in ridding yourself of one whom you did not love quite so well. They were also rumoured to be very effective in securing a job that had been applied for or the success of petition.

Among his other abilities, this magician was far famed as possessing the power, by charms and incantations, to 'tie up' the jungle, so that any hunter operating in that area would meet with total failure. The game would either not appear before his rifle; or if they did, the rifle would not go off; or if it did go off, the bullet would not strike the quarry even at a few yards' range. I had met this character some years ago, and have written about him in one of my earlier stories. [1] Like most members of his calling, he enjoyed a little flattery. Otherwise, I had found him quite friendly and had found nothing wrong in his weakness. After all, we all like to be flattered.

But the 'Ogre of Bellundur,' about which I am going to tell you, began its career in more or less the usual way, as a very ordinary and inoffensive tiger. Nothing was heard of it in its younger days.

Evidently it had confined its attentions to killing and eating spotted deer, sambar and pig, which swarmed everywhere in those times. Then the government began encouraging programmes of cattle-rearing, and as rich pasturage abounded, herds of cattle were introduced which multiplied into many thousands within a short period, to the detriment of the wild deer and pig that previously had grazed undisturbed.

'The Ogre,' as it came to be known later, now made its presence felt by varying its taste for wild game with a liking for prime beef, and this inclination grew rapidly to the exclusion of any other kind of meat. It killed and it ate, and it ate and it killed, till it had accounted for many herds of cattle and the villagers at last began to feel that something should be done.

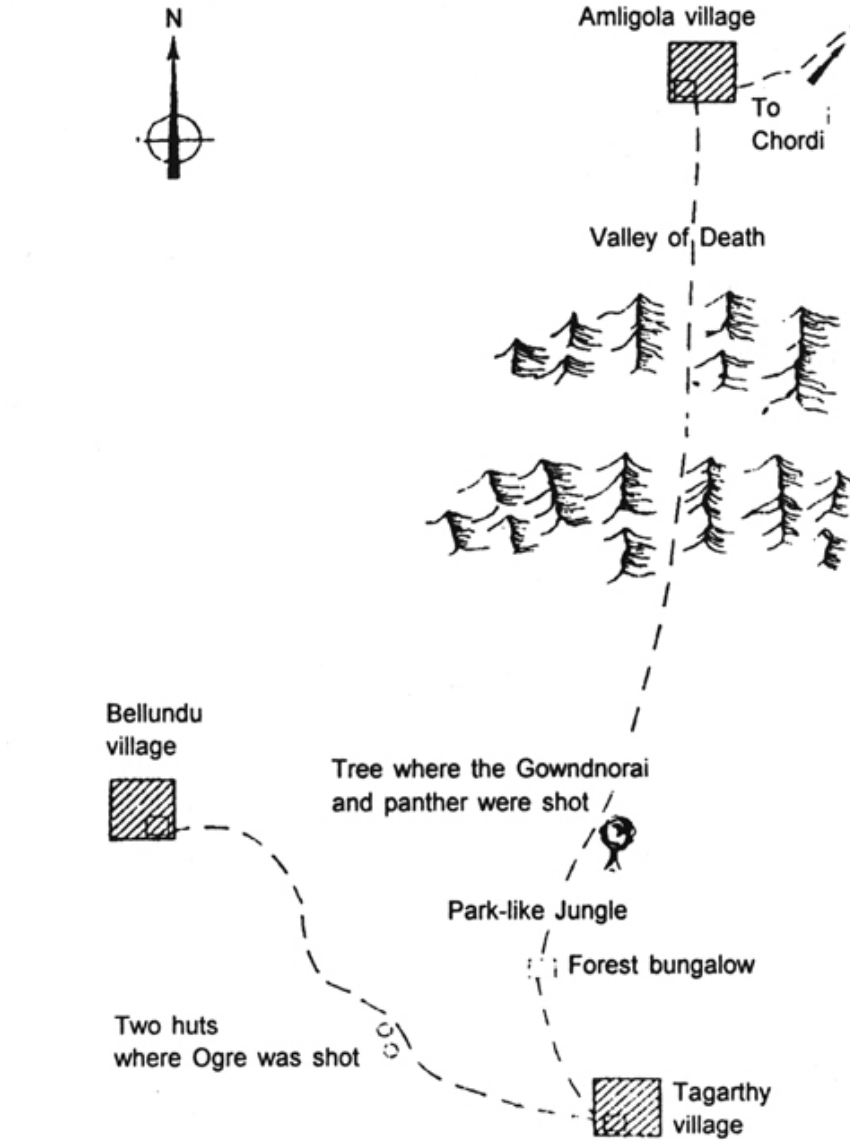
The Indian villager is a man of unbounded patience, an attribute easier to understand if one observes his complete apathy, his capacity for resignation and for accepting whatever misfortune it may be the will of God to bestow upon him. So, when I tell you that at last the villagers had had enough of this tiger and were determined to put a stop to its depredations you will realize that the Ogre had really gone too far. They decided to set a trap, catch it and then kill it.

A deep rectangular hole was dug in the centre of a game trail; the mouth was carefully concealed by thin interlaced bamboos covered with leaves and twigs, and the bait, in the form of the least valuable calf in the village, was tied to a stake at the farther end of the rectangular pit. A direct approach to the bait from any other direction except across the rectangular pit was made impracticable for the tiger by a vast mass of thorns packed tightly around it on both sides and beyond, leaving only the one approach open.

Everything went according to plan and on the third night the tiger fell into the pit.

The following morning all the inhabitants of Bellundur village turned out, including the necromancer, to gloat over their erstwhile enemy and throw firebrands at it, before putting it to death by the simple but rather slow process of spearing it from above. Evidently nobody had a gun, and the question of cruelty, of course, did not occur to anybody. For was not this animal the tiger which had killed and devoured so many of their cattle?

SKETCH MAP: OGRE AND GOWNDNORAI TIGERS
(Chapters 2 and 3)



Not only did the inhabitants of Bellundur have no guns, but they did not appear to be very rich in spears either. I discovered afterwards that just two people had spears, or articles that might pass as such. One was a short affair, less than four feet long and entirely blunt at the end. The description fitted more a crowbar than a spear. The second was a true spear and belonged to the local temple. It was reputed to have been used in a war two and a half centuries ago, but

was now as blunt as the aforementioned crowbar, having been employed many times for digging yams out of the earth. In any case, the shafts of both weapons were too short to reach the tiger from the surface of the pit, but this mattered little, as each of their owners was confident that, with a single throw of his particular weapon, he could transfix and kill the imprisoned beast.

Much argument is said to have arisen as to who should cast his weapon first. Finally, but I do not know on what grounds, the owner of the crowbar won the dispute. Taking careful aim, he hurled his weapon; no sooner had it left his hand than its blunt point was deflected and the side of the weapon rather than its blunt point, struck the flank of the tiger with a dull thud.

As might have been expected, the tiger did not take lightly to this form of treatment. It roared its defiance and glared up at its tormentors. There was widespread tittering amongst the assembled crowd as the second spear-man, after glancing contemptuously at the crestfallen owner of the crowbar, prepared to make his cast. The 250-year-old spear flew downwards to its target, the blunt point embedding itself fairly in the tiger's hindquarters.

Now Bellundur was totally unarmed! And the Ogre lost its temper. With a burst of unexpected energy, it sprang upwards to the rim of the pit, groping with the talons of its forefeet. They reached it, held and embedded themselves in the soft soil. The hind feet, kicking the air madly, found purchase against the sides of the pit and levered the beast upwards. And the next moment the tiger was free, leaping out of the mouth of the pit like a demon from hell, and far more dangerous.

Just one of the crowd stood in its *path* to freedom; all the rest had fled. The tiger leaped over the man before it, kicking backwards with all four feet extended, and the claws of one of those dreadful feet met the back of the man's skull before he, in turn, could gather his wits to run. It was only a glancing blow, comparatively light considering the force that the tiger had put into it, for if the paw had struck the head fully the skull would have been smashed like an eggshell. As it was, the tips of the claws caught in the skin at the back of the man's neck, and the weight of the tiger, as it leaped over the man's head, did the rest.

Then the tiger had gone. The man fell where he had been standing but he was quite alive. The whole of his scalp, removed neatly from the bone, now hung over his face, the long hair streaming down before him instead of behind. It took three days for this man to die, for to the very last moment he lived in the hope that his scalp could be put back. He was the Ogre's first victim although admittedly unintentionally so.

Naturally, with the healing of his wound, the tiger grew cunning. Other baits were tied out for it with various forms of traps, but they were studiously ignored. All its killings of cattle thereafter were done in broad daylight, generally in the afternoons while the herds were placidly resting after having grazed all morning and their attendants were huddled asleep in the shade of the bushes. Those who were awake or had been awakened by the short cry of the stricken victim, at first attempted to drive the Ogre off by shouting and throwing stones. But the Ogre soon put a stop to such tactics by leaping upon one of the graziers and mauling him severely. Strangely enough this man made a complete recovery, though the lesson that had been given was salutary enough. Thereafter, at sight or sound of the tiger all herdsmen fled, leaving their charges to its mercy.

The situation at Bellundur went from bad to worse. Cattle owners could no longer trust their animals to the forest for grazing, but endeavoured to feed them at home, and this of course cost a lot of money. Correspondingly, the tiger's hunger grew as the supply of Bellundur beef was cut down, so it extended the range of its operations to include Tagarthy and some of the smaller neighbouring hamlets. Its fame for daring as a cattle-lifter began to spread far and wide.

That was how a gentleman, whom we shall call Mr Johnson, came to hear about the tiger.

Johnson was an officer in railway service who had lately been transferred to the area from some other part of India where tigers did not exit. This made him very keen to attempt to bag the beast that was the talk of the neighbourhood, and as he had a rifle he made his way to Bellundur, which was only about seven miles from the railway track, on the few days' leave during which he hoped to succeed. And this is where old Buddiah, the necromancer, comes into my story.

Hearing that a white man had arrived and was making inquiries about the tiger, Buddiah donned his ceremonial saffron robe, plaited the long roll of filthy false hair that he kept for such occasions in a coil around the crown of his head, smeared ashes liberally across his forehead, which he further decorated with vermilion marks of a religious significance, hung his chain of large amber wooden beads around his neck, and holding his gnarled walking-stick, blackened by being soaked in oil, in his hand, presented himself before Johnson, offering his services, claiming that they were absolutely indispensable if the white man wished to succeed in shooting the tiger.

Now the situation was really very simple. To anyone of moderate experience, it was obvious that old Buddiah was endeavouring to earn a few rupees but more than that he was taking the opportunity to impress his fellow villagers with his greatness as a magician. He

wanted them to feel that even a white man had to come to him for help. If Johnson had used a little psychology and common sense, he would have recognized these things and given the old man a boost with a few rupees to humour him. Instead, Johnson lost his temper, told the magician to get out of his presence, and when Buddiah began to remonstrate indignantly, made matters worse by threatening to break his neck!

So, the necromancer stalked away in fury: his prestige with the villagers, which he had been endeavouring to enhance, had been severely lessened by the white man's words. He felt his companions would laugh at him secretly, although he was still confident that they feared him too much to do so openly.

The villagers, on the other hand, felt abashed. Although none of them had any liking for Buddiah who had exploited them systematically since childhood, he was, nevertheless, their own magician. One of themselves. To be spoken to in such a fashion by the white man, and to be threatened with a beating, reflected scant respect for their magician and incidentally for themselves and the village as a whole. Thus by his hasty words, Johnson had made enemies all around instead of friends. The villagers left him where he stood and refused to have anything more do with him. Nor would anyone sell or hire him a bait to tie out for the tiger.

Being of a determined nature, Johnson made up his mind to succeed in spite of the local noncooperation. He made his way back to Tagarthy where, by exercising the tact he should have displayed at Bellundur, he was able to buy two ancient bulls. Engaging herdsmen, he had these two animals driven back to the outskirts of Bellundur, where he tied each up in a *nullah* said to be frequented by the tiger, or so he was told by the herdsmen he had engaged; but as these men were from Tagarthy and not from Bellundur, they did not know very much about the tiger's movements.

The following morning Johnson and his herdsmen visited the baits. One had disappeared. It certainly had not been taken by the tiger, for there were no pug-marks to be seen in the sandy bed of the *nullah,* which bore a number of human footprints instead. Had these been made by his own men the previous day, or by others? The other bait had not been touched.

Johnson rightly came to the conclusion that the villagers of Bellundur had stolen his first bait. He stalked into the village with a loaded rifle, demanded the return of the bull, and then threatened to inform the police. To all of which the villagers assumed an air of injured innocence. They maintained that the human footprints he had seen in the sandy ravine were those of his own men when they had tied the bait and asked him to prove otherwise. To Johnson's dire

threats to shoot the thieves, the yokels turned a deaf ear and smiled.

Fearing the second bait would also disappear, Johnson ordered his two men to construct a *machan* over it, in which he sat that same afternoon, perhaps more to protect his bait from being robbed than in the serious hope of bagging the tiger. But the unexpected happened. I am told the tiger turned up while it was still daylight. Johnson fired, succeeding only in wounding the animal, which got away.

Throughout the next week, Johnson, with commendable determination, scoured the jungles in search of the tiger. No one came forward to assist him; even his two henchmen refused to accompany him on the plea that it was too dangerous. Unaided, the white man lost his way on one occasion and was compelled to spend the night in the forest. In the end, bitterly disappointed, Johnson had to return to duty without bagging his tiger.

Everything was quiet for some time after that. The Ogre did not show up and the villagers of Bellundur had to admit that, in spite of their best efforts at noncooperation, the *sahib* had rid them of the pest that had been exacting such a heavy toll of their cattle. Buddiah, the magician, was more aggrieved than ever. He saw his pride and reputation at a still lower ebb, for he had announced boastfully that the *sahib* would not or could not shoot the tiger; he had done so nevertheless and had rid Bellundur of the hated cattle-lifter.

So the cattle were driven out to the jungles once again each day for grazing. That is, until the inevitable happened!

Early one afternoon a herd rushed pell-mell back to the village minus one of its members—and minus the nineteen-year-old youth who had gone out with the animals that morning to graze them. Nobody worried about the matter till nightfall. Then the relatives of the boy grew a little anxious about him, while the owner of the missing cow grew far more anxious about his valuable animal. A search the next morning revealed the cow lying dead: her neck had been neatly broken by a large tiger whose pug-marks were clearly to be seen in the field where she had been struck down. A hundred yards away, hidden under a bush, was the body of the missing youth.

There was, however, this difference between the two carcases: the cow had not been eaten, while rather more than half of the youth's body had been devoured by the tiger. The familiar pattern had appeared once more: an innocent tiger had been turned into a man-eater through being wounded and left to fend for itself.

Tragedy succeeded tragedy after that and the pattern of events was repeated. The people of Bellundur locked themselves in their huts at sundown while the cattle were kept starving in their pens. Old Buddiah's prestige was at its lowest ebb.

Lack of human prey drove the tiger into extending his operations

towards Tagarthy and more distant villages, and that was when the beast began to be referred to as 'The Ogre,' a name that was whispered with bated breath behind locked doors and only during daylight hours. Otherwise it would surely hear and bring dreadful vengeance upon the man who dared refer to the creature as a tiger.

After darkness the Ogre was about! It roamed everywhere and a man was not safe even in a locked room. The Ogre, or one of its spies, an evil spirit of the air in the form of a bat or an owl, or one of the many devils that lived in the jungle, might hear what was being said and carry words to the dreaded man-eater.

Then the man who had spoken against it was indeed undone! It would be only a matter of time before the Ogre exacted a terrible revenge. His fate was sealed and there was no means of escape. That was the universal opinion.

At this stage my old friend, Doctor Stanley, the medical officer of Tagarthy village, wrote a long letter to me and related this story, inviting me to join him in an attempt to end the Ogre's career. This doctor, who owned only a .12 bore shotgun and no rifle, had shot many tigers himself in his younger days, parelleling Dick Bird, the Postmaster of Santaveri, whom I have mentioned in another story. Now that he had grown older, he felt that his rather antiquated gun, although still a trusty weapon, might not be quite up to the mark for a man-eater.

I met him three days later in the front room of his dispensary-cum-hospital, after motoring to Tagarthy in my Studebaker. The first thing he insisted upon was a tremendous meal, with gallons of tea, after which, over clouds of pipe-smoke, we discussed 'old times' for about three hours. Generally long-suffering by nature, at times I become impatient; finally I reminded the good doctor that there was a job of work to be done. Obviously the first step was to visit Bellundur and pick up the trail from there.

The Studebaker had a hard time to reach this village. The track, which was always bad, had become really terrible after the last rains. The doctor, who sat next to me, said we should have walked. Having reached Bellundur at last, I set about undoing, as far as possible, some of the mischief that had been done by the tactless Johnson. I called upon Buddiah, who was sulking in his hut, asked him to don his ceremonial robes and make *pooja* for me and repeat all the mantras he knew, to enable me to succeed in shooting the man-eater, presenting him with ten rupees to cover incidental expenses.

He brightened up at once. In no time at all he stalked out into the marketplace, all dressed up for the occasion, where the first thing he did was to demand another five rupees from me to cover the cost of a black fowl and a bottle of the local spirit called *'arrack.'* The fowl

was to be killed, cooked and eaten by him, presumably to placate the spirits of the jungle, and the *arrack* was to be drunk, also by Buddiah, presumably for the same purpose. The old man declared that only thereafter would he be in a proper condition to utter the mantras that would lead to the downfall of the man-eater. Dr Stanley and I, knowing what state that would be, pretended hearty agreement.

I handed over the money and resigned myself to a further delay of another hour at least, which would be the shortest possible time for the cock to be half-cooked while Buddiah had conditioned himself with *arrack* for saying his mantras. But the old man, and the villagers of Bellundur especially, had to be humoured if the damage done by Johnson was to be repaired.

The doctor and I chatted while the unfortunate black cock was procured, slaughtered before our eyes, parboiled into a curry and then devoured by the greedy old necromancer. With scarcely an interval he proceeded to empty the bottle of *arrack* by the simple process of applying the neck to his mouth and pouring the contents down his throat. Why he did not choke in the process amazed me.

This done, the magician staggered to his feet. He was dead drunk and could hardly stand erect. With bloodshot eyes and an inane smile, he produced what looked like a bracelet of twisted and dried jungle vines from a filthy cloth-bag that he brought out from somewhere on his person. Asking for my rifle, he proceeded to pass this bracelet over the end of the muzzle and down the length of the barrel three or four times. He was so drunk that he missed his aim once or twice, but I was able to rectify the error unostentatiously by quickly guiding the end of the barrel so as to allow it to be encircled by the bracelet.

That was the end of the mantra. The tiger's doom was sealed! It would fall to my rifle! The spirits of the jungle, in the person of old Buddiah, had eaten and drunk well. The crowd of villagers, who had been watching every detail while they stood around us in a circle, breathed this assurance loudly. In any case the mantra, together with their assurances, ended just in time, for the next moment old Buddiah fell to earth as if pole-axed.

The important thing was that good feeling had been restored. Buddiah's prestige was up again, as was that of the villagers and of Bellundur village itself. Dr Stanley and I were smiled upon as 'good fellows,' while the activities of the Ogre were momentarily eclipsed. Just then it was no more than an ordinary tiger, waiting to be shot.

It was now dark, and the trip back to Tagarthy in the Studebaker was a nightmare. We made it, however, without any broken axles or springs, but resolved that henceforth we would walk there and back rather than risk a breakdown, which would be inevitable if we tempted fate too much.

Stanley procured two baits at Tagarthy, which we duly tied out the next day at suitable points near the track to Bellundur, for you will remember that I told you that the tiger was by this time, operating throughout the area. After lunch we walked the seven miles to that village, and we were able there, without any difficulty, to procure another three animals as additional baits. Obviously the little show we had organized with Buddiah the previous evening had had its good effects. These baits were tied out at points which the villagers informed us were often visited by the Ogre.

Time was against us, however, and we were in too much of a hurry to be able to set up a *machan* above any one of the five baits we had laid that day. This is against my usual practice of constructing a *machati* first and tying the bait in full view of it afterwards, which has two advantages. Firstly a 'kill,' if it occurs, is in proper view of the *machan* and does not have to be shifted. Secondly, no noise is made in building the *machan,* which would be inevitable if the 'kill' occurs first. Such sounds may arouse the suspicion of the tiger if it is lying up or otherwise lurking within hearing.

It was again pitch-dark when we walked back to Tagarthy, keeping a sharp lookout with our torches against a surprise attack by the man-eater, but the only animal we encountered was a pangolin foraging amongst the dead leaves, out much earlier than usual for these creatures.

None of the five baits we had tied out was touched that night, but late in the morning of the third day, a man came running to the doctor's dispensary to announce that his cousin had been taken by the tiger. The victim and his wife, together with our informant and his wife, lived in two huts constructed side by side and only a short mile away along the track to Bellundur. The sun was at meridian when this cousin, who was returning from a visit to Tagarthy for provisions, came into full view of the other three members of the little community, gathered before their huts and were chatting together. They had been about to call out to him when he had screamed loudly and then vanished into thin air.

Our informant stated he had then grabbed his axe and set out to see what was the matter, accompanied by his cousin's wife, wringing her hands and lamenting aloud. The thought of the man-eater had never occurred to them. Rather they suspected that an evil spirit from the forest had done away with their companion.

Reaching the spot where the man had disappeared, they were terrified to find the pug-marks of a tiger in the soft sand of the trail. Prevented by fear from going farther, they were about to turn back when the wails of the woman, which had now increased in volume, annoyed the man-eater who had just begun to taste his victim not far

away. The tiger growled fiercely, whereupon both the man and the victim's wife fled. Stopping long enough to enable the two women to lock themselves into one of the huts, the man had come running to Tagarthy by a round-about route to inform the doctor and me of what had happened. The Ogre would be there still, he affirmed, feasting upon his cousin, if only we had the courage to come at once and shoot it.

Grabbing rifle, torch and warm coat, I set out at a jog trot with our informant, Stanley bringing with him the .12 bore gun and another torch. I was younger in those days than I am now, and the doctor younger still, so that we reached the two huts in fairly good shape, if a bit breathless. Minutes later, with the man in the middle, Stanley to the left of him and me to the right, we approached the place where the tragedy had taken place, determined to flush the man-eater on its kill.

The tiger sensed we were coming long before we knew where it was, for we heard no sounds of eating or the breaking of bones. As likely as not it had seen our arrival at the two huts, which were, as I have said, in full view of the spot where the Ogre had seized its victim.

When we were quite close, the man-eater began to growl, and its protests grew to hideous volume. Clearly, it was bent upon driving us away. If we beat a retreat now, while the going was good, all would be well. But if we continued to advance, it would either rush at us, or its courage might fail at the last moment, it would then run away.

We hesitated only a second before Stanley and I nodded to each other. With my left arm I thrust back the man who had called us, motioning to him with my hand to go away. Then we advanced, shoulder to shoulder. We could not see the tiger yet. Roar followed upon roar, and the bushes in front of us shook violently. We stopped, gun and rifle to respective shoulders, awaiting the onslaught that was inevitable.

It never came! At the last moment the man-eater shirked the encounter! It was accustomed to chasing and killing men. Never before had human beings deliberately followed and approached it. With a final shattering roar, the tiger sprang away from the spot and I was just able to catch a fleeting glimpse of a reddish-brown form hurtling into a bush; then it disappeared. I could have fired. Why I did not do so I just cannot say, but I was to regret my mistake.

The tiger must have been really hungry, for we discovered it had made the most of its opportunity by devouring over half its victim, leaving only the head, arms, legs and a few ribs uneaten. Stanley and I did not speak to each other. We were both experienced enough to know that the human voice carries a long way. Instead, I looked about

to see if there were any possible places to conceal myself and await the man-eater's return should it decide to come back to finish what scraps were left.

But the Ogre put an end to my reflections by its next action, as unexpected as it was sudden. It might have been hunger or natural ill nature, or maybe the fact that as it fled it saw only two humans and not a crowd, had dared to follow. Anyway, this extraordinary animal stopped in its tracks, turned about and started to come for us, roaring louder as it approached. The ground literally shook with the intensity of the sound, while its ever-increasing volume indicated that the tiger was getting dangerously close. You must bear in mind that all this time we could not see the beast for it was hidden by the bushes. What we could see was the bushes shaking violently as it came closer and closer.

What was happening just goes to indicate the axiom I have so often repeated in my earlier stories. There are no fixed rules in the jungle and no two animals are alike. Like us they are individuals; they react differently under different circumstances and the unexpected often occurs.

Standing shoulder to shoulder once more, the doctor and I turned to face the man-eater, which was making things easy for us and solving the problem by attacking. In another minute the tiger would have to show itself and then all would be over.

But the minute never came! For the Ogre was wily beyond expectation. At the last moment it changed its mind once more and began to circle us and the remains of its meal without showing itself, still snarling and roaring for all it was worth. The animal's tactics were now clear. Again its courage failed when it had been about to press home its attack. Now its intention was to drive us away with the noise it was making.

Then I had an idea. Its success depended on just how observant the tiger had been, how persistent was its memory, and how alert its instinct. It had seen the two of us approaching. That much was evident. Now if one of us went away and the other hid in the grass somewhere near the remains of the victim, would the tiger be aware of the fact? Would it think the coast was clear and return to its meal? Would it be tempted to follow and attack the one who was retreating? Would it see through the trick we were trying to play by stalking whichever one of us had remained behind and leaping upon that one from the rear?

There were too many imponderables in the situation and I confess I did not like them at all. Moreover, the doctor was armed only with a shotgun. If I suggested that he should go back and leave me behind, it was possible the tiger might decide to stalk him, when

Stanley would be at a decided disadvantage. Alternatively, if I left the doctor behind and walked away myself and the man-eater decided to attack him instead of me, the same disadvantage would be there. As a last resource, I could offer the doctor my rifle and take his gun.

Frankly, I did not relish that last solution. I was accustomed to my .405 in emergencies. No doubt Stanley had the same feelings for his shotgun. If we exchanged weapons we would both be unfamiliar with the firearm each of us was handling, and a shotgun, moreover, was hardly suitable for a meeting with a man-eater.

Evidently these very thoughts were passing through Stanley's mind and he solved the problem for me by whispering to me to hide while he would go away. Without speaking, I thrust my rifle towards him and reached for his shotgun, but Stanley turned it way from me, motioning impatiently towards the bushes for me to hide.

The tiger was creeping about now, circling our position and continuing to snarl and roar alternately. A single bush, not more than four feet high, grew about thirty feet or so away, its base hidden by the usual carpet of grass and greenery. There was no other large tree or rock that offered shelter. I tiptoed to the bush and took up my position behind it, crouching on the ground with my weapon ready. We waited till the tiger had reached a point that was opposite the direction in which the doctor would have to go to regain the track leading towards the two huts. Then I motioned to him to get away quickly.

With the purpose of letting the man-eater know that he was departing and that the coast would be clear to return to the meal, Stanley coughed slightly and began to talk to himself as he began to back slowly towards the track. I watched him looking intently in the direction where the man-eater was still demonstrating, his .12 bore gun ready for instant action should the animal charge.

But Stanley had made a mistake by talking. Instead of returning to its kill now that the coast was clear, as the doctor had hoped, this most unusual animal did the unexpected thing once again. Circling the scant clearing in which the remains of its victim reposed, and incidentally myself, the tiger began to follow the departing doctor. Worse still, it stopped roaring and snarling. Clearly, the man-eater now meant business. Whatever the Ogre was doing at that moment, or intended to do at the next, was to be done in silence. Stanley, already handicapped with only a shotgun, was going to be still further handicapped by not knowing from which direction the man-eater would attack him.

This thought worried me. It was hard to sit idly behind a bush while my friend's life might at that moment be in great danger. Without weighing the consequences I decided to creep after the tiger.

No greater folly could have been committed than by my action at that moment, and I will tell you why.

Try to imagine the doctor stepping backward, a foot at a time with his shotgun loaded in both barrels ready for instant use pointed towards where he thinks the tiger is, creeping upon him unseen and in silence. He does not know that I have left my shelter in the bush and am following him and the tiger. Then put yourself in the tiger's place, your composure now regained after any exhibition of bad temper. You move softly and silently, bent upon putting an end to this interfering human being who has dared to follow you. At the same time, you are aware that you are close enough for a final spring, but instinct warns you that to do so will court disaster. And you do not know that a second human being is following you. Behind them both am I, creeping forward with equally great caution, my Winchester cocked and ready for use at the first glimpse of the tiger. But I cannot see it, nor Stanley. All I can hear is the faint rustle of a bush here and there before me, as either Stanley or the tiger brushes against it despite their caution. Finally, do not forget that the distance between the doctor and myself cannot be more than forty or fifty yards now, with the tiger somewhere in between.

If only that tiger had had a little reasoning power, what fun it could have had that day! All it had to do was to conceal itself and then mimic the sound of a charging tiger by roaring 'Wroof! Wroof! Wroof!' Stanley and I would have opened fire. One or the other would have shot his companion. Perhaps with a spot of luck—or bad luck—we might have shot each other. I would have made more tender eating in those days than now! So would the doctor, even if he smelled faintly of iodoform! And what headlines for the newspapers! ' *Shikaries* after man-eater shoot each other! Man-eater eats both!'

So intent was I on following the tiger that all this did not dawn upon me at the time. The man-eater, unaware of being followed, kept steadfastly after Stanley; while the doctor, naturally worried by the silence that had succeeded the tiger's threatening roars, except for a faint and furtive rustling now and again as the tiger came after him, was wondering if he would reach the track to the huts before the attack came.

Then things happened! The doctor! The doctor reached the track. The tiger broke the silence with a shattering roar! Seeing nothing but hearing everything, I did not know right away whether the man-eater was launching its attack upon the doctor or myself. The doctor fired, and slugs from his gun spattered through the undergrowth uncomfortably close to me. The tiger, frightened by the sound, lost its nerve, turned, and dashed past me at full gallop. I saw the tiger coming, threw the rifle to my shoulder, and pressed the trigger at

almost point-black range.

Stanley told me a few minutes later that my bullet whizzed past his head within inches. The only thing that kept it from parting his hair, he affirmed, was that he was bald! Inadvertently the Ogre had almost succeeded in accomplishing what it had been unable to do by the power of reasoning. The doctor and I had narrowly escaped shooting each other.

We still had hopes, however. We both had considerable hunting experience. Both had been ready to fire when we had actually pressed our triggers. Both had fired at point-blank range. The tiger must be lying mortally wounded close by, perhaps it was even dead. One of us must have wounded it at least. In the excitement, we overlooked the fact that I had heard the slugs from Stanley's gun, while he had heard my bullet.

So we searched far and wide, but not a speck of blood did we come across. Of dead or wounded tiger there was neither sight nor sound! Then it dawned upon us. Hard though it was to admit, the truth stuck out a mile. We had both missed, although the Ogre had met us almost face to face. Stanley looked woebegone. I do not know what I looked like; but I know what I felt like!

We made our way in silence back to the huts, where to the man and the two women still hiding there we confided all that had happened. We were half a furlong from Tagarthy before my mind, numbed with disappointment, started to function again.

Normally a tiger, after being fired upon, avoids the place where that had happened for a long time. This tiger, it should be remembered, had been fired upon not once, but twice! Therefore, by all the rules, it should leave the neighbourhood and not appear there again. But was there just a small chance to the contrary? The Ogre had already shown itself to be of a most unusual disposition on two occasions. It fled and then turned and crept back again. And it had deliberately followed Stanley when the way was clear to return to its kill. Would it once again display its singular nature by returning to a place where, at least instinct must tell it, it had suffered two narrow escapes? The chances were 99 per cent against. That left a one per cent chance that the tiger might return!

I halted in my tracks as the thought came to me. The doctor stopped also, wondering what was the matter. I told him. Stanley frowned and puckered his forehead in thought. Then he shook his head. But he was too much of a hunter himself not to realize the chance was one that could not, must not, be missed. So we retraced our steps to the huts.

The man and the two women, now all locked together in one of the huts for mutual safety, were surprised at our early return. When

we told them why we had come, they were really pleased. But they were honest enough to say they did not think we had any chance of success. It was the man's opinion that the tiger would be many miles away by now.

Stanley and I retraced our steps to the place where the remains of the man-eater's victim lay strewn about, exercising extreme caution while negotiating the patch of jungle through which the doctor, the tiger and I had played our strange game of hide-and-seek. There was neither sight nor sound of our quarry.

A strange mixture of relief and disappointment filled us, relief that the Ogre had not launched another attack and disappointment at the feeling that it might never return.

My earlier survey of the possibilities of concealment, although made in such a hurry, had about summed up the chances accurately. Apart from the four-foot-high bush where I had stood while the doctor retreated there was no other place in which to conceal myself. Hiding behind that bush in daylight for a man-eater, as I had done already, was one thing; but remaining there after darkness was quite another. The tiger, with its ability to see at night, would spot me immediately as it approached what was left of its victim from any angle other than directly opposite the bush behind which I would be hiding, while for me to see it would be impossible. Further, should it indeed return in spite of being shot at twice only a few hours earlier, the man-eater would undoubtedly make an extremely cautious approach and I would not be able to hear it. Lastly, there was no possibility of erecting any sort of shelter behind that scanty bush that would not immediately betray my presence.

What could I do? I was reluctant to forgo that tiny possibility of the man-eater's return. To commit suicide, and that too in a most painful manner in the jaws of the tiger, I was still more reluctant.

There seemed no solution as we thought about the matter without speaking, till suddenly the doctor had a brainwave. Would it not be possible, with the help of the man and the two women in the near-by huts, to dig a narrow hole just where the human remains were scattered? He would hide in the hole which would be wide and deep enough to conceal him, wait until the tiger returned, and shoot it at point-black range.

Several obstacles to the execution of this plan presented themselves. Firstly, the tiger might discover the hole and shy away; worse still, the tiger might decide to investigate it. Secondly, admitting that the man-in-the-hole was hidden from the tiger, the tiger was equally hidden from the man-in-the-hole, who would necessarily have to stand erect to be able to shoot the beast, during which process the latter would surely spot him when he appeared, as

it would seem, out of the very ground. When that happened, the tiger would be frightened, yes; but it would also be decidedly annoyed. What transpired after that would depend upon which of the aforementioned reflexes gained the upper hand.

Well, there was no use thinking further about it. The chance, and the risk would have to be taken or the whole plan dropped. Time was passing and it was now after 3 p.m. We would have to work fast. We hurried back to the huts, where the inmates gladly volunteered to help us, but stated they had no implements of any sort to dig with. The doctor, who in his capacity of village medico wielded much influence,

solved this by returning to Tagarthy at the double, from whence he came back in an incredibly short time with six helpers, two with pickaxes, two with crowbars, and two with large baskets in which to remove all traces of the earth we dug out. With the three earlier helpers and ourselves, the eleven of us set to work, with the result that astonishingly soon the hole had been dug and all traces of loose earth removed and thrown far away.

I knew that as the father of the plan, Stanley had prepared the hole to sit in it himself. I also knew that no amount of persuasion would dissuade him. If I tried to tell him that his shotgun was not an effective weapon against so dangerous a quarry, he would reply that it was just the right thing at such close range. Nor would I be able to gainsay the truth of his assertions as, in reality, at point-blank range a .12 bore gun has its merits. So I resigned myself to inactivity for once by spending the night at Tagarthy.

Our helpers were just gathering their tools together, prior to departing with me, when Dame Fortune once again took a hand in this strange adventure. Two men burst upon us, having run all the way from Tagarthy in search of the doctor. One was the village *patel,* quite a young man for such a responsible post; the other was his servant. The *patel* annouced that his wife, who was heavily pregnant, had slipped and fallen while carrying her pot of water from the well. She had aborted and was bleeding profusely. The doctor must come at once.

While he was still speaking, the young man summed up , the position and realized that Stanley was preparing to sit up for the tiger. So to make his summons more forceful, he started lamenting aloud that the doctor, as his best friend, must come to his aid at once to save his wife's life, while in the same breath he denounced the woman as a stubborn

wench. How often had he told her not to carry weights, particularly the water pot from the well. Was he not the village *patel* ? Did he not have servants enough for this task? Yet in her wilfulness she would never listen to him. Now this was the result. And never

mind the tiger; was his wife's life not far more important?

Stanley looked at me, chagrin written large upon his face. Then he gripped my arm tightly, affectionately.

'Good luck, Andy,' he muttered, 'and be careful, please. Would you like to use my gun?'

'Thanks, doc,' I replied, 'you know how it is. Old Winny will do the trick.'

In another minute Stanley and the other members of the group, which had grown to twelve, were lost to sight. I was alone with the remains of the dead man.

Dusk was fast approaching and there was not a moment to be lost as I slipped into the hole we had prepared, to squat at the bottom and look upwards at a circle of sky above my head. By canting my Winchester, loaded and cocked, at an angle with the butt against my right thigh and the foresight-guard leaning against the wall of the hold opposite me, we had made sure, by means of measuring Stanley's .12 bore gun in just a position, that the end of the muzzle would not be visible above ground level.

In the excitement and hurry of forming and executing what I now began to realize was a rather insane plan, we had overlooked the fact that it would be terribly hot inside the hole. The earth around had been exposed to the sun's rays all day, no air could enter, and with my body in close proximity to the sides of the cavity, air could not circulate anywhere. I soon began to perspire profusely.

Fortunately in those days there were no wild elephants around Tagarthy or, for that matter, in any of the districts to the northwest of Mysore state. Those were the times when tigers roamed in hundreds, but things have now changed and carnivora are scarce, but 'jumbo' in his wild state has extended his wanderings into those jungles and herds of elephants have now made their home there, where once there were none.

I remember that it was almost deathly silent inside the hole and I could scarcely hear the roosting calls of peafowl, junglecocks and other birds as they settled down for the night. To hope to hear the man-eater's arrival by any faint sound that it might make was out of the question. I would only be able to hear it if it roared or snarled nearby, and the Ogre was hardly likely to do that—or so at least I thought till I recollected that the tiger had in fact done just that only a few hours earlier. How I hoped it would repeat its performance rather than decide upon a silent approach!

It was almost dark when the circle of sky above my head was crossed by an elongated black form that passed silently by. A nightjar, with wings outstretched, had flown low over the spot, evidently to investigate the possibility of devouring the insects that were already

assembling to feed upon the exposed flesh that hung in shreds from the human bones and devoured portions of the carcase of the tiger's unfortunate victim. I could hear the bluebottles as they buzzed across the opening above my head to settle on the mess, while the stench of decaying flesh, increased by the sun's rays in which it had been baking all day, seemed to cling to the ground and flow into the hole as an invisible, nauseating liquid.

Would the tiger come? Would it start eating right away? Or would it know that something unusual was afoot? It might have been watching us from the cover of some distant bush. It might even know, at that very moment, that one of its hated foes, a man, had gone into hiding somewhere in the ground. Now would be an excellent opportunity for the tiger to unearth and devour that enemy. The thought was not a very bracing one!

Where there had been an oval of sky above, two stars now twinkled down upon me and I knew that night had fallen. They seemed so serene and peaceful up there, oblivious to my predicament down in the hole. My thoughts focused upon them and I wondered at what other tragedies, taking place at that moment in other remote corners of the earth, they also twinkled upon so impartially.

The next moment the two stars seemed to become endowed with a baleful significance. They turned into two cruel eyes that glowered down upon me in hostile anticipation. Of what?

I forced myself to cast off this depressing idea and to think of something else. It is amazing what strange and often irrelevant thoughts come to one when in danger, as I was then. Perhaps this is nature's way of providing protection from panic. I wondered if Stanley would be able to save the life of the *patel's* wife.

That was when I first heard the sound: faint but distinctly heavy breathing.

It must be the tiger! It had located me and was creeping upon its stomach to get close enough to pull me out of my hiding place. Involuntarily, my hand reached towards the rifle. The touch of metal and wood, warm like everything else in that wretched pit, was very comforting to my nerves.

The sound ceased for a while. Then I heard a sudden, loud hiss, followed by silence again. Could this be a passing panther?

I have already mentioned that panthers were scarce in this area as the tigers had driven them out simply by devouring them. Nevertheless, there were one or two to be found here and there, and it was possible that an odd member had happened to be passing and had stumbled upon the exposed kill, creeping forward to snatch a mouthful. The heavy breathing and the hissing sound could certainly have been made by a panther, bent upon stealing from the tiger's kill.

I did not hear anything more for quite a long time. Then came a dull, scraping sound, as of something gliding over the ground above my head. Could a large snake be the cause? A hamadryad? There were quite a number of them to be found in these forests, where the vegetation and jungles were of the 'wet' variety, unlike the forests farther south.

Silence followed, while I strained my ears to pick up the faintest of sounds, and my eyes stared upwards at the faint light of the hole above me till they ached. The two stars still twinkled down upon me, but whether in disdain or mockery I did not know. I saw that they had shifted farther towards the edge of the circle above me and would soon disappear from view, indicating that time had passed since I had first observed them. I would miss their company and then would really be alone. Would their place be taken by other stars, I wondered?

This thought was still in my mind when at last the heavy silence was broken. There was a loud crack and the man-eater began to gnaw the bone it had just broken.

The noise made by a feeding tiger indicates its mood. Generally it is one of great contentment, and the sounds of mastication, gnawing, chewing and the tearing and rending of flesh follow one another as the feast progresses. Should there be a second tiger present, or the killer be a tigress with cubs, there is a lot of growling and wrangling, accompanied by threatening snarls when the other tiger, or a cub, approaches too closely. For despite the ties of mother love, which are considerable—and instances have been known where a tigress has sacrificed her life for her cubs—when it comes to eating, instinct seems to tell a feasting tigress that food is something not to be shared too soon, and to urge her to eat her fill before allowing her companion, mate or even her cubs to approach and eat what may be left.

The tiger above me began to growl. I knew then that it could not be alone. Perhaps there were cubs, perhaps another tiger, accompanying the man-eater. The situation was decidedly complicated and more than what I had bargained for. None of us had considered this possibility earlier in the evening, when this sitting-in-the-hole idea had occurred to Stanley.

I thought hard what to do next. Obviously, in order to take a shot at the tiger, I would have to locate it first by peeping over the edge of the hole and then by drawing the rifle right out of the hole and placing it on the ground outside so as to take aim. All this would entail considerable movement; I might even make a sound of some sort; the rifle might knock against the ground. The feeding animal would hear me and attack before I could free my weapon. There might

be a slight hope of escaping the tiger's attention should he, or she, happen luckily to be facing the other way.

But there was a second tiger present. Even cubs could give the game away if they saw my head and shoulders, followed by my rifle, emerging from the ground. It was certainly straining imagination and luck too far to hope that all the animals above me would have their backs to me and be looking in the wrong direction. And if there should be two tigers above me, which of them was the man-eater? A silly question, that: obviously the one that was eating. But had both developed the man-eating habit, or only one? I must not kill the wrong tiger. Therefore, I must shoot both to take no chances.

The alternative course of action was to sit in silence in the hole, allow the animals to finish their meal and afterwards go about their business, then call it a day. But I had come here to shoot the man-eater; not to hide from it. I thought of the man it had killed and was now eating. What would Stanley and the villagers say of me when they came in the morning to find the ground covered with tiger pug-marks, the scraps of the man otherwise completely devoured, and me hiding in the hole?

Well, here goes, I said to myself, and a millimetre at a time, if such slow movement can in truth be possible, I began to position my feet so as to support me. Then slowly, very, very slowly, I started to raise myself, to bring my head to ground level. This in itself, took a long time, for I had to avoid making the slightest sound, and my thighs and legs were cramped from squatting so long on my haunches. The tiger continued feeding, growling and snarling now and again to keep the other tiger, or perhaps the cubs, away.

At last I was on my knees and toes and I stretched my two hands downwards to help support my weight on my outstretched fingers. Then very slowly, I began to raise myself.

Time had passed, and the strain on my hands and legs began to tell. But I must not hurry. Even now, as my ears came closer to the surface above, the tiger's growls grew stronger. I began to be frightened.

My hands were beginning to tremble with the sustained strain of supporting my weight, when I sensed that the top of my head must have reached about ground level. I could not delay longer, for the tiger or tigers would be able to see me should they be looking in my direction, whilst I would not be able to see them. I therefore quickly raised my head, until my eyes were level with the earth.

A terrifying sight confronted me. Luckily, through sitting in the darkness of the hole for so long, my eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom, so that I could see, only a few feet away, and lying broadside on, the enormous form of a tiger extended on its belly,

chewing some part of the victim which it was holding between its front paws. Worse still, there was another form, also at full stretch, slightly farther away from me and a few feet from the feasting tiger, but facing it, and watching anxiously as the latter swallowed mouthful after mouthful. This second tiger, facing the first, was also facing me, and could not fail to see the top of my head popping out of the earth.

It let a snarl of surprise and scrambled to its feet. I ducked into my hole like a jack-in-the-box, grabbed my rifle, and looked upwards, expecting to find one or both tigers attacking the opening. I was wondering whether to sit tight, or to raise myself and the rifle quickly to ground level and risk a shot, but I remembered there were two tigers, not one outside. So I funked it and decided to sit tight.

All this occupied only a few seconds, but in that time the feasting tiger had not been idle. Hearing its companion snarl, and seeing it spring to its feet, this animal, not knowing that the sight of me was the cause of the excitement, concluded that its companion had decided to fight for a share of the kill. There was a second loud roar, followed by a fearful din, as the feaster, who was obviously the man-eater, attacked the tiger that had spotted me.

Now is my chance, I said to myself, for their attention was so distracted that they would not notice me.

I quickly raised myself. First the rifle, then head and shoulders, reached ground level. For a moment I could see nothing and do nothing because of the dust that was raised by the fighting animals. But neither tiger was anyway in sight, nor was there any growling or snarling to be heard.

I could not understand it. Perhaps the second tiger had fled with the first in pursuit. But if that was so, I should have heard some sounds at least, snarls and growls as one animal chased the other away. Perhaps they saw the rifle, or even the top of my head emerging from the hole, and fled at such an unexpected apparition. Then, too, there should have been growling and snarling; at least some sounds of departure.

As it was, the jungle was silent. I could not fathom it; it was eerie. The thought then occured to me that, if the man-eater had chased its companion away, it would undoubtedly return to finish what was left of the kill. So I ducked back into the hole to await its return and the renewed sounds of eating.

I waited in vain. Maybe half an hour had passed when I heard a loud, sustained human scream. It shattered the silence, rose to a crescendo, and then faded into choking sobs and was still. Then I heard other yells and shouts, and could make out a deeper voice and a more shrill one. These were the voices of the man and one of the two women from the two huts not far away. They were screaming for help.

That was when I grasped what had happened. The second woman had been taken by the man-eater! In chasing its companion away from the feast, or perhaps in its headlong flight after seeing my rifle and myself appear out of the ground, the man-eater must have passed the two huts where the man and his wife, and the widow of the late victim, were sheltering. But how did the Ogre get its second victim? Perhaps it was in such a towering rage that it just dragged her out of the hut in which she was sleeping. This tiger certainly was not hungry enough to justify such an action as it had been feasting all this while.

I wondered what to do. Should I remain where I was, or hasten to the huts? In either event, there was not much that I could do. There was little chance that the man-eater would return to the bones of its first victim when it had a fresh one at its disposal. And I would not be able to follow it up with the second kill, because of the darkness. That could be done only after daybreak.

I decided to remain where I was. It was just possible that the second tiger—the one that had been chased away—might return to the scant remains lying above me. If it did so, I would shoot; even if it were not the Ogre itself, this second tiger would undoubtedly become a man-eater in time. I remembered how, a short while ago, it lay anxiously waiting for a chance to eat the human remains, though held at bay by the feasting man-eater.

I spent a sleepless night after that, uncomfortably hot and stung by tiny ants and other insects that had decided to share my shelter. Nothing came, and no sound disturbed the silence till about four o'clock. Then a hyena discovered the bones above me and a great commotion began. The hyena smelt the tigers and knew it was about to commit the unpardonable crime of robbery. It also knew that to be caught by the owner or owners would mean death. It was undecided, therefore, between satisfying its hunger and its fear of being killed, and in this state of indecision made a great noise, letting the whole jungle know that it was faced with a tremendous dilemma. I could hear the creature running rapidly round and round, uttering weird sounds of every conceivable dilemma. 'Chee-ah! Chee-ay! Chee-ay!' it chattered, then growled like faraway thunder. 'Goodoo-Goodoo-Grooo!' Then it decided to be mournful about the whole business: 'Mee-ay! Mee-ay! Mee-ay!' it pleaded piteously, like a cat begging for food.

But the problem remained unsolved: the tiger did not show itself, but might come at any moment, and that would be the hyena's last if it lingered. All this amused me and served to distract my thoughts from the fearful tragedy that must have been enacted so close to me while I was powerless to intervene.

The opening above me grew a little brighter with the coming of the false dawn before the hyena, who had remained noisily persistent all this time, finally summoned up enough courage to start eating. I heard the crunch of a few bones for a short while, then fear must have returned to its craven heart, for I heard the pattering sound of its departure. I could picture the poor beast slinking quickly away, a human bone between its jaws, for gnawing later in the safety of its shelter among the rocks, or in a hole in the ground, far from this place of danger and lurking death.

I awaited the advent of the true dawn before raising the Winchester and myself very cautiously above ground level. The coast was clear and I dragged my cramped legs out of that awful hole, stamped about for a few minutes to restore the circulation, and set off for the huts to see what had happened. There I came upon a dreadful sight.

The terrified man and his wife, still hiding in a corner of one of the huts, told me a very harrowing tale. Along with the widow of the man-eater's victim, they had decided to sleep in one of the huts, the one they felt was the more secure of the two. The man had taken good care to sleep in the centre of the floor, equidistant from all the walls while his wife had slept to the left of him. The second woman had been forced to sleep somewhere by herself. So she had laid down a little distance away. Naturally she must have felt a little nervous, but as modesty forbade her to lie down to the right of the man, she had been compelled to sleep as far away as possible from the couple. So she lay down near the wall of the hut and opposite their feet.

The hut was comparatively small. It was roughly a square, about twelve feet by twelve. Allowing six feet for the man and his wife who were sleeping in the centre of the hut, and another three feet in order to be clear of their legs, the second woman was, therefore, lying at the most not more that a yard from the wall. The foot of the walls of such huts, in the damper parts of India, are kept a few inches from the ground so that termites cannot climb them overnight and destroy a large part of the structure by daylight. This practice leaves a slight opening around all four sides at ground level.

The man-eater who had passed very close to the hut, either in pursuit of its companion or in flight from me, was probably in great rage. It must have caught a glimpse of the sleeping woman, or sensed her presence, through this small opening, and had decided to drag her out. It had inserted one of its paws under the opening, grabbed the woman and had begun to pull her out.

Her screams and wails, which I had heard, had awakened her two companions, who in turn had started to yell and call for help. Meanwhile the man-eater had succeeded in dragging the woman's

head and neck outside the hut, and had killed her by tearing out her gullet. But the rest of her body was stuck inside, for in dying, the woman clung to two of the bamboos supporting the wall of the hut. These had broken, and the end of one of them, piercing her saree and jacket, had gone right into the flesh of her side, thus wedging her body against the bamboo wall.

The pandemonium caused by her wails, and the shouts of her companions, seemed to have acted as a deterrent; the tiger changed its mind and abandoned the victim. The carcase of the woman as it lay before me was a dreadful sight. The tiger's claws had pierced the chest and torn one breast to ribbons. Then the Ogre had bitten right through her gullet and had wrenched out her windpipe, leaving the bones of her neck and the skin behind to keep her head from being totally severed. She lay in a pool of her own blood most of which had soaked into the dry earth, except for some that coagulated here and there.

The two survivors, man and wife, crouched wide-eyed and paralysed with fear in a far corner of the hut, expecting the man-eater to return at any moment. In fact, they were so terrified as to be oblivious of the fact that it was already daylight outside. Hearing my approaching footsteps, and thinking they heard the tiger returning they started to gibber in fear.

I called aloud to reassure them. The man and the woman then hurled themselves at the door of the hut, opened it, and rushed outside, to fall on the ground trembling and crying in terror and relief at the same time. They were quite hysterical and took a long while to calm down enough to tell their story.

I had entered the hut and was reviewing the dreadful sight inside when Stanley and some of the men who had helped us the previous evening arrived upon the scene. Stanley had been awake all night but had not heard any report from my rifle, the sound of which would have carried to Tagarthy village. He therefore concluded that the tiger had not returned—or that I had been killed—and was hurrying to find out what had happened.

I fear my first question took the good doctor aback: 'How is the *Patel's* wife?'

He looked rather pained at my irrelevance, then muttered, 'She's safe. But what has happened?' I told the story. Our plans were soon laid.

We bundled the two survivors and their belongings out of the hut, an action that did not require much persuasion, and advised them to return, with the rest of our party, to the village. Stanley would hide in the other hut, while I would conceal myself in the one with the corpse of the slain woman. Ordinarily, the man-eater might be expected to return to its kill, but as there was a second tiger which

was potentially a man-eater, if not already one, the doctor would be available to deal with it.

We laid our plans carefully. To begin with, neither of us would fire in the direction where the other was hiding. Secondly, should Stanley see one of the tigers, or both of them first, he was to hold his fire till the actual man-eater approached the carcase of its victim in order to give me the chance of a shot at the real culprit. As soon as I had fired, the doctor was to shoot the second tiger if it was still within sight. These precautions were necessary to avoid a mistake at the last moment for should the doctor fire first, he might shoot the wrong tiger and the man-eater would escape. We had to account for the Ogre primarily, although for reasons I have already given the second tiger had to be shot too. But the man-eater must die first and we could not risk its escape.

As I was tired after a sleepless night, while Stanley was less so, even though he had spent a good part of the night attending to the *patel's* wife, it was agreed that I should go back to Tagarthy for a meal and some sleep, returning by three o'clock, bringing the doctor's lunch and some food for both of us to eat later on besides drinking water, tea and the torch that Stanley fitted to the barrels of his shotgun. It was wise that one of us should remain on guard, just in case either of the tigers took the unusual step of returning to the kill by day.

Another idea then occurred to me. I told Stanley and he agreed to it. We took a gunny sack from one of the huts and walked down to the remains of the earlier kill. My plan was to remove all that was left of it, so that should either of the tigers, or both of them, think of revisiting the old spot, they would find nothing. That would urge them to come to the huts, where we would be in hiding.

A slight hitch arose when we asked our men to do this job. Being of high caste, they recoiled with horror and flatly refused. There was nothing but for Stanley and myself to do the job ourselves. Stanley did not mind, for he was a doctor, but it was an unpleasant undertaking for me. What little remained of the meat was two days old and stank abominably. Further, bluebottles had laid their eggs in the remains, and in the hot sun maggots had already hatched in myriads. The flesh was covered with a seething mass of them.

We gathered all the bits and pieces and put them into the sack. Since none of our followers would touch it, I had the unhappy task of conveying this nasty burden on my shoulder all the way to the village. It was surprising how heavy those bits and pieces turned out to be, although they represented so very little of their owner.

I smelled dreadfully and was in a bath of perspiration; some sticky fluid had oozed through the sacking from the putrefying flesh and bones within. It was on my hands, shoulders and neck when I

dumped my grisly burden at the entrance to the local police *chowki.* The constable on sentry gazed at me goggle-eyed. For once in his life he was too taken aback to ask for a statement. I remembered about the statement well enough, but did not care to remind him. Why should I? There was going to be a hell of a row in any case, when the sub-inspector and other busybodies from headquarters arrived at Tagarthy. Whey had we removed the remains from the scene of the tragedy? How were the police to know the man had been killed by a tiger? He might have been murdered? Perhaps he had committed suicide? Time enough to answer these questions later. What I wanted was a bath, tea and plenty of it, a hot meal and some sleep.

I hastened to the little quarters occupied by the doctor, which he had invited me to share with him, and yelled to his servant-boy to prepare a gallon of tea. Then I divested myself of my stinking clothes and washed my shirt. Next I had a bath, and what a bath!

Emerging at least two pounds lighter in weight, I set about the tea and had consumed maybe two quarts when the doctor's servant seriously suggested I leave some room for lunch. But there was no lunch left when I stood up from the table. I observed the servant had conceived a new respect for me as a glutton of great capacity.

I told the boy to put the doctor's lunch aside and to make dinner for both of us, saying that I would take the three meals with me to the two huts at three o'clock. In sadness, the youngster shook his head and replied aggrievedly that there was no lunch left. I had eaten it all. So I gave him money to make some lunch; also the two dinners. And I told him to awaken me at 2.30 sharp.

When he awakened me it was nearly three o'clock, but as the meals were ready and packed, together with two flasks of tea and two canteens of water, I had only to pick up the doctor's torch and place it in a large bag with the food and flasks, sling the canteens and my rifle over my shoulders, and set out for the huts.

Walking fast, I soon arrived to find a very hungry doctor who had no news of the tigers. He swallowed his lunch while we reviewed our plans in whispers and drank some water. The flasks of tea we decided to keep for the night.

At four o'clock we separated; I went to the neighbouring hut where the woman's body lay, taking my rifle, torch, dinner and a flask of tea with half a canteen of water, leaving Stanley in the other hut with his share of the tea, water and food. Taking up my position at the farther end, as far away as possible from the spot where the corpse was lying half in and half out of the little structure, I made myself comfortable in preparation for the long vigil of fourteen hours till dawn.

I have cultivated the habit of sitting cross-legged for hours on

end, practically motionless and without sound, a habit essential if ever you have to sit up for game. The slightest movement, or the faintest sound, will betray your presence to any wild creature, animal or bird. If your quarry is an animal possessed of a keen sense of smell, the direction in which the prevailing breeze happens to be blowing has also to be taken into account, and the stronger the breeze, the farther your scent is carried. For this reason, poachers of deer in India seldom go out on a windy night. Falling rain prevents scent being carried far, but equally so all animals, except tigers, take shelter from the elements, and if the rain is really bad, even tigers and elephants restrict their movements.

Now, as tigers have only a very poor sense of smell, that factor did not trouble me. What I had to be careful about was that the man-eater should not discover my presence by sight or sound. After the adventure of the previous night, and the scare it had received, we could expect both tigers to be very cautious. It is remarkable how instinct enables a man-eater to differentiate between a possible victim, helpless and defenceless, and a would-be hunter capable of taking its life.

Having been sheltered from the sun, the corpse was not smelling yet, and it was otherwise pleasant inside the hut, offering a great relief from the conditions of the previous night, in the hot and tight-fitting hole. Everything about me was quiet, for, in fear of the man-eater, the herdsmen of Tagarthy and the neighbouring villages for miles around had abandoned their usual habit of driving their herds out to the jungles to graze.

The afternoon passed in silence except for the buzzing of flies that had discovered the dead body and were busy laying their eggs in the raw flesh. The darkness of evening was accentuated within the hut and it soon became difficult to see, although I could perceive the lingering daylight outside, visible right around me through the few inches of space between the base of the walls of the hut and the floor.

Because of the scarcity of panthers and the larger species of wild cats, jungle fowl, which are the normal prey of these animals, swarmed in this area and their calls, together with those of spur-fowl and peafowl, told me the sun was about to set. Silently, I munched the food I had brought with me for dinner, and drank some tea.

In due course the cries of the birds died away, to be replaced by the calls of a nearby herd of spotted deer and the belling of a more distant sambar stag. This told me the sun had set, although by now it was already quite dark inside the hut where I was sitting.

Soon the nightjars began their teasing cries and a night-heron wailed in the little stream at the bottom of the valley. Then I knew that night had fallen indeed, and I could now see nothing in the

interior of that hut. If the man-eater came and started to remove the cadaver of the woman, I would be compelled to use my torch.

This raised a problem. When I used the torch, its beam would necessarily strike against the inside of the wall of the hut and be reflected back into my eyes. I would not be able to see beyond, or to look through the gap between the wall and the floor. In other words, the man-eater would not be visible to me. The thought began to trouble me and I decided to change my position. I would lie prone on the floor, as close as possible to that part of the woman's body which remained inside. This would give me a great advantage. By keeping my rifle extended on the ground before me, all I would need to do, when the tiger came, would be to point the barrel in the animal's direction and press the trigger. The man-eater could not avoid making some noise when it began to pull the woman's carcase out of the hut, for, as you will remember,

in the struggle of the previous night the end of one of the bamboos of the hut-wall had become embedded in her flesh. The tiger would have to tear the body free from this obstruction.

Gathering the flask of tea and my weapon, I crept quietly across the floor till I reached the woman's body, and then lay down beside it, the rifle on the ground before me with the butt under my armpit and the end of the barrel only a few inches from the opening. Accidentally my shoulder touched something that was cold and hard and very stiff. It was the corpse's leg and I drew a few inches away.

Three hours passed with no sign of any tiger. It was well after ten o'clock. Tigers generally return to their kills around eight; panthers very much earlier, and I was beginning to think our quarries had decided to keep clear of the huts when the leg which had touched my shoulder three hours ago touched it again.

What was far worse, that cold stiff leg was now moving very distincly. It was not only rubbing against my shoulder now, but moving gently forwards.

Not a sound could I hear. But the leg moved again! The hair at the back of my neck stood on end. Panic seized me. I was on the verge of scrambling to my hands and knees and getting as far away as possible from that awful, mangled human thing that had come to life. Then reason returned. I could feel myself trembling and the perspiration was pouring down my face as I discovered the solution. The leg and its owner had not come back to life, nor did it move of its own volition. The man-eater was moving it!

I could see nothing. There was no sense in sticking the barrel of my rifle forward and firing blindly; that would only scare the tiger away, to continue its depredations elsewhere. At the most I might wound it. I had first to make certain what I was firing at.

Then it was that I heard a faint scratching sound, coming from somewhere very close to me and a little to my right. I could still see nothing. I was tempted to switch on my torch, but remembered in time that to do so might result in dazzling myself. Yet it was imperative that I should find out where the scratching sound came from and what was causing it.

I did an extremely stupid thing. Not being able to see, I thought I might be able to feel what was going on, and with this in mind, I stretched my right arm very slowly forwards in the direction of the scratching.

I did not have far to reach. My questing fingertips contacted something hairy, something sinewy, and the next instant all hell was let loose. The man-eater, perhaps remembering its difficulty of the night before to free the body of its victim, or maybe in an endeavour to secure a better grip on the corpse, had extended its paw into the gap below the wall and was groping for a hold on something solid. That movement of its paw was the cause of the scratching sound I had heard a moment before. When my fingertips touched its skin, not having heard of ghosts, the tiger knew there was something alive inside the hut.

An ordinary tiger would have bolted. But the Ogre who was no ordinary tiger and had always done the unexpected, lost its temper. It let out a terrific roar, then grasped the wall of the hut in its jaws and began to tear it apart.

My task after that was easy. A great hole appeared before me and the beam of my torch revealed a horrifying tiger with the matting of the wall still stuffed in its mouth. With only a few inches to find its target, the bullet of my .405 entered high into the throat; then I rolled over and over with my rifle to get out of range of what I knew would follow. I was near the far end of the hut when the Ogre hurled itself through the gap. But I had time to put two more shots straight into

its head. With the dying animal threshing about the floor, I rushed to the door of the hut, flung it open and leaped out, only to be confronted by yet another terrifying spectacle.

Another tiger was there, about twenty feet away and to one end of the farther hut! But it was lying on the ground, stretched on its side and still twitching. Stanley had killed the second tiger, almost at point-blank range, with lethal balls fired simultaneously from both barrels of his shotgun. Because of the noise made by my own rifle, and because of my own excitement, I had entirely failed to hear Stanley's shots.

The doctor related afterwards that he heard the man-eater's roar, followed by the report of my first shot. Then the sounds of the hut-wall being demolished. Disregarding our agreement, he had dashed

out to my aid, to be confronted by the sight of the second tiger, standing broadside on to him , a few yards away, watching its mate and obviously undecided what to do. He had fired both barrels of his shotgun, loaded with lethal balls, into the animal's heart, killing it instantly.

As we suspected, the man-eater turned out to be a tigress, the other animal her mate.

There was much tom-tomming and rejoicing at Tagarthy until dawn, and when the news reached Bellundur next day old Buddiah strutted about, filled with pride. Was he not the greatest of all magicians? Had not his mantras brought about the doom of the man-eater and also of her mate? Buddiah was happy indeed. With his fame as a necromancer soaring once again, he could look forward to many feasts of cock curry and many more bottles of that fire *arrack* for which the villagers of Bellundur were famed. He was dead drunk by midday, when I called to thank him.

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1 See *Nine Man-eaters and One Rogue.*

Three

The Aristocrat of Amligola

The title of this story will lead you to expect that the creature I am going to tell you about had nobility and fearfulness, and that he came from a place named Amligola, but you might not guess that the story really concerns a very large tiger that had other characteristics which I am sure you will agree were far from noble. Very few of you will have heard of Amligola, for it is situated in the remoter jungles of the district of Shimoga in Mysore state, and was only a hamlet at the time of my story.

People called him 'Gowndnorai' in the Kanarese tongue, being a term approximately equivalent to 'aristocrat,' and he earned his title by his unexpected behaviour at the time he first appeared in the thick forests surrounding the hamlet. It was rumoured that he came from the jungles of Tagarthy, a place renowned for tigers and only eight miles away; while others said he had strayed from the Karadibetta Tiger Sanctuary, which he had deserted in disgust because his kindred in the sanctuary were numerous and the quest for food had become more competitive.

The 'Gowndnorai,' apparently, did not like this sort of thing. It was bad enough to have to hobnob with the proletariat of the tiger species, but when it came to having one's quarry snatched from under one's nose, as frequently happened, by younger and fleeter tigers, or the whole hunt thwarted and the prey driven away by a fledgeling tigress, he felt it was time to shift to more select jungles, where there were fewer of its species and more game for him to hunt.

There is a small hillock in the forest about two miles from Amligola which borders the track leading from this village to Tagarthy, and it came about that around five o'clock one evening, woodcutters returning home along this *path* were surprised to see a tiger sprawled on a rocky promontory of the hillock, basking in the rays of the sun that had still an hour to go before it would sink behind the tops of the towering teak trees to the west.

They quickened their footsteps. Everyone knew that these dense jungles were the homes of tigers, although such animals rarely showed themselves in broad daylight. The tiger they were now watching although fortunately from an appreciable distance, was an enormous brute and, to judge by his attitude of lazy indifference, seemed to care little about their presence. They were talking loudly and he could see and hear them, but he continued to lie on the warm rock as he turned

his huge head in their direction with the mildest curiosity.

Thus the woodcutters judged it better to get home while the going was good and before darkness overtook them. Against such a monster they would have no chance whatever, once the sun sank and the brief jungle twilight merged into gloom.

Quite often thereafter, the graziers, woodcutters and forest guards saw this tiger of an evening, at about the same time, sunning himself on the same promontory and looking at them quite unconcernedly, as they moved through the jungle or followed the footpath that wound around the base of the hill on its way to Amligola.

None of them remembered having seen a tiger do this sort of thing before. Panthers had been seen quite often, on the same rock, on other rocks, sunning themselves of an evening; but never a tiger. The larger carnivores are too cunning and too shy to expose themselves in this way to an easy shot from a rifle.

Nobody fired at the basking tiger, for the very good reason that nobody in Amligola at that time possessed a rifle, while the range was too great for the ordinary muzzle-loading gun, a couple of which, unlicensed of course, were owned by local villagers.

For the first few months this seemingly inoffensive tiger had been content to confine his attentions to the spotted deer and other wild fauna of the forest. Then, as rarely happened in this area that was so close to the Western Ghats and received a heavy rainfall, the southwest monsoon failed one year and the jungle became dry. The grass withered, the fields lay fallow, and the wild creatures that fed on the grass and the grain were compelled to move away to regions where a little water was still to be found and some grass for their bellies. The herds of cattle that had hitherto fed along with the deer and had not been molested by the tiger so far now found themselves alone.

Nevertheless, this tiger was choosy about his meals. He left the herds and wandered into the village postmaster-cum-schoolteacher's field, where he started by killing the owner's large white bull that used to draw his cart all the nineteen miles to Sagar town once a week, on shandy (market) day. Not only did the tiger slay the huge bull with one slap of his paw and a twist of its neck, but he slung the quarry across his back and walked off with it in broad daylight, neatly leaping the six-foot-wide *nullah* that divided the field from the forest.

The field was at the back of the postmaster's house, and the owner was in the backyard, washing his clothes at his little well, and saw the whole thing happen. He shouted at the top of his voice, hoping to frighten the tiger into releasing its prey, although this would have done no good anyway because the white bull was already

dead. But, far from being alarmed, the tiger was not even perturbed. He walked majestically at the same pace towards the *nullah,* the dead bull across his back, jumped the obstruction, and disappeared into the forest beyond.

The tiger killed again, and quite often after that, but strange to relate, on each occasion his prey was a lone, large bull or a fat, sleek cow. Never did he attack the herds, as other tigers and panthers had done before him, to choose and kill the first animal within reach.

This tiger spent a long time in reconnoitring and selecting his victim, and it always had to be the biggest animal he could find, proportionate to his own colossal size, revealed by the immense pug-marks he left on the fields and in the windblown sands of the pathways leading into the forest.

At that time I happened to visit Tagarthy, a favourite haunt of mine, where I came to hear about the Gowndnorai and his colossal size. As this animal was killing normal prey I had no intention of interfering with him, but repeated stories of his extraordinary size made me curious to catch a glimpse of him if I could.

So I set out on foot one dark night along the jungle track that led through dense forest to Amligola, the rifle across my back in case of emergency, a three-cell spotlight torch in my hand and a set of spare cells in my pocket.

I remember that night well. On the way, the beam reflected the green light of the eyes of spotted deer and sambar, bobbing up and down as they tried to avoid the torch-beam; the single, red eye of wild boar that refused to face the light but rushed away; the wide-set blue light from the eyes of a bull-bison that stared morosely as I passed; the red-white light of a panther's eyes as they sank behind a small shrub and then peeped at me from over the top; and the pinkish-blue eyes of a sloth-bear as it sat on its haunches to watch me as I padded past in my rubber shoes, not ten feet away.

I had entered the fields bordering Amligola when I met the Gowndnorai and immediately recognized him, although I had never set eyes upon him before. Two great blobs of light blazed white-red like brilliant stars suspended just above the tops of the grasses that were swaying gently to the night breezes as they blew down from the small hillock. It might have been a hundred yards away.

This tiger was, indeed, of colossal proportions.

The Gowndnorai gazed back at me unflinchingly as I stopped to watch him with the beam of my torch directed at him steadily. We returned stare for stare, and thus we remained for what might have been the better part of ten minutes. Then the tiger did a strange thing. With a low grunt, and eyes still blazing into the bright rays that confronted him, the Gowndnorai started to walk towards me.

No ordinary tiger would have done that; it would have bounded away. No wounded tiger, or even potential man-eater, would have done so either; it would have charged towards me, roaring in furious attack, or have melted away into the jungle, refusing a direct encounter.

The Gowndnorai did neither. He advanced upon me slowly, inexorably, determinedly, a guttural grunt issuing from

his slightly opened mouth as he came, no signs of anger or of fear upon his striped visage.

One fact soon became evident. This strange animal, whatever his reason, was obviously quite determined to come right up to the torch and find out what it was all about.

I must confess his attitude rather unnerved me. I had no wish to shoot the beast, for he had done no harm to the human race. But what he might do when he came right up to my torch and found a man behind it was anybody's guess.

The tiger was now less than fifty yards away and still approaching, pace by pace, when these thoughts rushed through my mind and the reason for its strange behaviour dawned upon me. There were just four days until Christmas and this was the middle of the mating season. Without doubt the tiger was a male, and a tigress was sitting on her haunches somewhere near by, regarding the scene with admiration, as to her adoring eyes the Gowndorai displayed his prowess and contempt for danger.

Tigers can be very dangerous if encountered in the mating-season in company with their newly-found spouses. Their desire to flaunt themselves and their natural aversion to any intruder who disturbs their lovemaking, together with a fear that some harm might come to their mates, combine to turn them into creatures of destruction that will wipe out the intruder, man or beast.

Then came the disquieting thought that the tigress might even be creeping up behind me in the darkness, in support of her mate. I did not want to remove my torchbeam from the Gowndnorai's eyes, in case such action might precipitate a charge; at the same time the possibility of the close presence of the tigress behind me left no alternative.

Taking a chance, I whipped around, allowing the torch-beam to flash through the jungle in a quick semicircle to my right, and then behind. Sure enough, that was exactly where the tigress was. She was seated on her haunches, like a great big cat, directly behind me, awaiting the oncoming of her mate.

The reason for the tiger's strange behaviour was evident enough after that. He had been approaching the tigress when I had happened to move between them, and the mating urge had been too strong to

deflect him from his purpose. I had no illusions about what he would do when he found me standing between him and his girlfriend. It was time to get the hell out of there!

This I proceeded to do forthwith, and with dispatch, by stepping sideways as rapidly and as silently as possible, while still keeping the torch-beam directed upon the tiger. The Gowndnorai halted abruptly and his grunt turned into a loud growl. What was worse, I could hear the tigress growling behind me. It seemed that a concerted attack was imminent.

With my left arm I unslung the loaded rifle, slipped the butt into my shoulder, and pressed the button of the other torch that was clamped to the barrel of the weapon, using my thumb for the purpose. The two beams shone together for a moment as I prepared to slip the three-cell torch into my trouser-pocket prior to placing my right forefinger upon the trigger.

Perhaps it was the two torches, shining together, that averted disaster. Maybe the Gowndnorai did not like the sight, and the potential danger revealed by the presence of a second light appearing so suddenly where a moment before, there had been only one. With a series of snarls he bounced obliquely forward in the general direction of his mate, and understanding the situation, I followed his movements with both torches still alight. As soon as he had reached her, the two animals turned to face me. Now two pairs of white-red eyes glared back at me resentfully.

Then I began to pace backwards in order to escape. Easier said than done, indeed. Have you ever tried to walk backwards, in pitch darkness along a twisting footpath, through heavy grass and jungle, with a rifle balanced awkwardly against your shoulder in your left hand, your thumb pressing against a torch switch, and another torch held in your right hand which is also helping to keep the rifle in place, while a pair of mating and naturally resentful tigers confront you?

I succeeded in the manoeuvre for a short distance and then, as the two tigers had shown no inclination to follow me, I whisked around in order to hurry along the footpath for a few seconds and afterwards whisked back again to see what the tigers were doing. They were in the same positions, obviously glad that I was departing.

Soon I reached Amligola and the hut of the headman, who was my friend, where I related my adventure. Ramiah, the headman, was a widower and invited me to spend the rest of the night with him. Perhaps in daylight I could study the tigers under better conditions, he suggested.

Along with numerous mugs of milk, and some rather stale *vadais* (small pungent cakes) that he offered me, Ramiah and I began to chat, but it was not long before loud roaring and growling from the forest

told us that the tigers had begun their mating in right earnest. The din continued for quite a while. Then there was a period of silence, after which the noises started all over again. This sort of thing continued till we fell asleep.

Next morning I was in no hurry to investigate, for I knew that both would be resting after their strenuous mating-sessions and my appearance too early might precipitate a showdown. Besides, I was feeling inordinately sleepy after the rather restless night I had spent in Ramiah's hut.

It was nearly ten in the morning when I awoke and, after another bout with Ramiah's now tough *vadais,* followed by at least three cups of coffee which (rather than the tea that I would have much preferred) is the normal beverage of the Kanarese villager, I prepared to investigate the scene of the previous night's noisy mating. Ramiah excused himself from accompanying me on the plea of urgent field work, so I set out alone.

The spot whence the noises had come, when at last I located it, may be a little over a furlong away, revealed the energy that the two tigers had put into their lovemaking. Although fairly hard at this time of the year, the earth was scored and dug up in clods, the smaller shrubs having been ripped from the soil, roots and all, by the antics of the gambolling beasts.

From this place the ground dropped into a densely vegetated ravine, where scratchings upon the bark of a tree, along with freshly-shed dung which—unlike the panther—a tiger leaves exposed rather than covered with earth, indicate the way the lovers had entered the ravine. Curiosity prompted me to follow, although I knew that what I was doing was rash; so with rifle at the ready and eyes that endeavoured to see through and behind every bush, I advanced in silence, taking care my rubber-soled shoes did not tread upon any dry leaf or twig.

No sooner was I in the shadow of the large trees that grew in this hollow than the sweetish stench of death was borne to my nostrils and I knew I was approaching an animal that had been killed. A few yards farther, and I found it. The partial remains of a huge wild sow that had been slain by the Gowndnorai and upon which the two tigers had feasted hungrily, for tigers love pork. Although a sow, the pig had put up a fight, as could be seen by her hoof-marks in the ground.

I did not examine the sow very carefully, for you may be sure I was watching all around me against being surprised by one or the other of the terrifying lovers, and it was while I was doing this that I caught a glimpse of something white that showed through the leaves of a jungle-plum bush, perhaps thirty yards away. I approached this object, and it turned out to be the pelvis bone of a sambar doe also

half-eaten by the tigers during their spree the night before. There was no means of knowing which of the two animals—the sow or the sambar— had been killed first, but it was clear that the latter had been slain some distance away and then brought to the spot by the Gowndnorai for the benefit of his mate, for no wild animal would have come anywhere near a spot where a kill had already been made.

The presence of the three crows, flying down from a branch to the earth and up again, betrayed a third kill slightly farther away. The fact that the crows were flying to the ground indicated that neither of the tigers was near. This kill turned out to be a spotted stag which the Gowndnorai had also brought to the ravine after killing it elsewhere. Little of the stag had been devoured, for by this time the tigers were too stuffed with food to do more than sample the meat.

But I had not finished yet with finding kills. In fact, I tripped over the carcase of another sambar doe that lay most halfway between the carcase of the spotted deer and the sow. There was little left of this sambar, most of it having been devoured by the tigers. I was almost certain now that this sambar, and not the sow, as I had thought, had been the first of the four victims. The sow had followed next, her hoof-marks on the ground showing she had fought before she had been killed. She ought not to have come near the dead sambar. Perhaps one of the tigers had chased her there. The other sambar and the spotted stag had been carried to the spot later, for nowhere had I seen any traces of dragmarks upon the ground, which made clear that the tiger had carried his victims, one at a time, across his back. If I needed further proof of his size, here it was indeed.

There is a strange satisfaction in reasoning out the facts of apparent jungle mystery, and I felt this as I reached my conclusion. The ravine was, in fact, a veritable charnel-house; the stench of death hung heavy in the air, and suddenly I grew afraid.

Something warned me that I was being watched. I took a quick pace to the rear to bring my back against a tree and so shield myself against attack from behind. Then I began to scan every bush and tree-trunk in the immediate vicinity.

Not a breath of air stirred in the forest that grew hotter with the passing hours, as the sun climbed higher into a cloudless sky, although I could not see it at that moment because of the trees. Not a whisper of sound broke the stillness; even the two cicadas that had been calling from trees higher up the banks of the ravine were now silent. The crows had seen me and watched the scene with mute expectation, heads cocked slightly to one side, beaks partly open and panting with the heat. It was as if the jungle lay in breathless suspense, awaiting the next act in the drama that was about to be played at any instant.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a tuft of grass, frail and

feathery, suddenly sway for an instant and then become still. It had no business to sway on that breathless forenoon, unless something had pressed against the stem near to the ground.

The something must be one of the tigers!

Most tigers—even a man-eater—will hesitate to attack if it feels that a man has discovered its presence. It prefers to have the element of surprise on its side. I knew this from my own experience, so I opened my eyes as wide as possible and stared hard at the spot where the grass had just moved. This would tell the tiger I had discovered where it was hiding.

For a moment I could see nothing. Then two black protuberances, tipped white behind, seemed to rise slowly from beyond the grass, and I knew that I was looking at a tiger's ears. An instant later, the animal raised its head a fraction higher and I was gazing into the baleful eyes, of one of the tigers. I knew it was the female. Her head was too small to belong to a male of her mate's size. That left the tiger to be contended with. He was probably in hiding at the moment, I knew not where, gathering courage for a sudden onslaught, if for no other reason than to prove to the tigress, who was watching closely, what a great brave creature he was.

Nothing happened while the tigress continued to peep at me over the top of the grass, and after a while I began to hope that she was alone. Maybe her mate had gone to look for a fifth victim!

It must have been ten minutes later when the tigress began to make a peculiar sort of noise. I might say she was mewing, but it was too guttural and hoarse a sound for that word to convey. She was summoning her mate. As she had not attacked me all this while, it was clear that the tigress, by herself, lacked the courage. What would happen when the tiger arrived would be quite another thing.

I decided that discretion was the better part of valour and I slipped behind the tree-trunk that I had stood against all this while. Then I started to back away.

The next moment a loud roar from the top of the ravine behind me told me I was too late. The Gowndnorai had arrived. Something in his mate's mewing calls seemed to warn him that all was not well. I could hear him crashing through the dead leaves and undergrowth now, coming directly towards me at the gallop.

I am far from being a good climber, but sheer funk lent me agility and I dragged myself up the tree with commendable speed, the rifle hanging on my shoulder. The first fork was hardly eight feet from the ground. I reached it and tried to climb higher, when the rifle slipped awkwardly from my shoulder down to the crook of my arm. I hitched it up again, and just as fast it slipped down once more.

The Gowndnorai arrived at the base of my tree and my

movements made him look upwards and see me. I decided I must face him and bring the rifle from the crook of my arm to my shoulder. I expected him to make a bound at me at once, but strangely enough he did nothing of the kind. He crouched on the ground instead, looked up, and snarled and snarled and snarled.

Rather foolishly, as I think of it now, I changed my mind and decided to try to climb higher, but in any case I could not go very far. I managed another seven feet perhaps when I found I had gone as high as the thinning branches would permit. At this juncture, the tigress, confident of the protection offered by her mate, emerged and advanced towards him in gambolling leaps till the two of them were together barely fifteen feet below.

I hoped that neither of the tigers would try to follow me, as the bough to which I was precariosly clinging was too frail to support any additional weight, while by my own foolishness in ascending higher I had put myself in a nasty plight. I was obliged to cling to the branch with both my hands and knees, and this prevented any possibility of using my rifle, which I could not unsling, since I would fall from the tree if let go my hold. Moreover, the strain on the muscles of my hands and legs was tremendous, and I could not possibly maintain the position for long.

It occurred to me that I might try to shoo the tigers away by shouting aloud. The ruse would probably succeed; but again it might not. The sound of my voice might irritate the animals, particularly the tiger, who till now had behaved like a gentleman.

The two tigers settled the matter after a few minutes, as if by mutual consent, when they calmly walked away side by side. Allowing another five minutes to pass, I descended cautiously, but there was no sign of either animal even after I climbed the bank of the *nullah* and started walking to the village. I really owe the Gowndnorai and his mate a debt for sparing my life.

Shortly afterwards I was trudging back to Tagarthy, thinking I had heard—and seen—the last of the tiger. But as I was soon to discover, that thought was entirely wrong.

Hardly had I been a month in Bangalore when the headman of Amligola, with whom I had spent the night listening to the Gowndnorai and his mate, wrote me a postcard which he had tramped all the way to Tagarthy to post, informing me that the big tiger was growing overbold and begging me to come and shoot him. It was only a matter of time, he said, before the Gowndnorai would turn man-eater.

I oppose hunting tigers that have not molested man, and I was not going to accept the headman's fear of something that had not yet happened; the Gowndnorai might never become a man-eater and I had

certainly no justification for shooting an animal that had spared my life on two occasions.

It happened that I had a few days to spare and could think of no more pleasant occupation than trying to see my benefactor, the huge tiger, once again. But things had changed by the time I reached Amligola, although it was only a matter of a few days since Ramiah had written. The big tiger had grown bolder indeed, killing more of the villagers' choice cattle. Ramiah had already lost his best bull, and now the Gowndnorai saw it fit to slay his second best.

This was too much for the already exhausted patience of the headman. Disdaining to wait for my arrival, Ramiah journeyed to the town of Kumsi, about twenty miles away, borrowed his cousin's .12 bore shotgun, and sat up to ambush the tiger when he next visited the outskirts of Amligola in search of prize cattle. Having succeeded so many times before, the Gowndnorai walked into the trap all unsuspectingly, to receive a charge of slugs full in his face from Ramiah's borrowed weapon. The tiger then dashed away roaring terribly as he went. So great was his anger, caused by the wound, that he entirely demolished a bamboo platform erected by the villagers on a field from which to drive away the birds that fed upon their grain, and which stood in the tiger's *path* as he rushed back to the forest.

All that day and night, and throughout the two nights that followed, Ramiah and his companions were forced to listen to the pain-racked roars of the wounded tiger as he voiced his woe and anger to the jungle at large, while they cowered within their huts.

Unaware of what had happened, as nobody told me anything at Tagarthy, I arrived late in the evening of the fifth day at Amligola, having walked through the jungle in blissful ignorance for eight miles without hearing or seeing a thing. We did not hear the tiger that night, but the morning of the sixth day brought the first result of Ramiah's ill-timed shot.

It was just after nine o'clock and I was about to set out on my return journey to Tagarthy, when a man staggered into Amligola and fell exhausted in the one lane that formed the main village street. He said that he and another man had started out from the village of Chordi, which was some miles away, just before dawn, and had been travelling to Amligola when, about two miles from their destination, they had seen a tiger following. Accustomed to tigers and not knowing that the Gowndnorai had been wounded, they were not unduly perturbed, but decided to keep a sharp lookout behind them as they walked.

For the next two or three hundred yards they saw nothing. Then they glimpsed the tiger, and this time he was not more than thirty yards behind them. Sensing that the animal was bent upon mischief,

the two men had broken into a run, whereupon the tiger roared and charged them.

The man who had staggered into Amligola had escaped merely because he happened to be the faster runner. He told how the tiger had quickly caught up with his companion, who was racing just a yard or so behind. His friend's dying scream had compelled him to look back over his shoulder and the lucky woodcutter affirmed that the sight he had seen would remain in his memory for ever. The tiger's countenance had been dreadful to behold. It was badly mangled and a mass of blood. He did not think the animal had any eyes left: its ferocity vented upon the victim it had just seized, was truly awful. Not daring to look back any longer, the man had raced to Amligola for all he was worth, to reach its shelter utterly exhausted.

The wounded Gowndnorai had killed its first victim. To judge by what we had heard, Ramiah's slugs had blinded the unfortunate beast.

Without delay, I hurried to the place where the attack had been launched, Ramiah and the surviving woodcutter reluctantly accompanying me. The tiger must have been ravenously hungry; he had eaten the most of his victim on the spot. Then he must have heard us coming, for he had carried away what remained as he dashed into the undergrowth, perhaps only a matter of minutes before our arrival. We knew the tiger had eaten well, for his victim's head, hands and feet lay scattered about, a sure sign of a hearty meal.

The trail was fresh, but the undergrowth was extremely lush. Ramiah and the woodcutter were Kanarese and not of the stuff of jungle-men and trackers. They flatly refused to come any farther. So I followed by way of the broken weeds and the bent branches of his victim. It was difficult to watch ahead and both sides against a surprise attack while moving fast at the same time.

The Gowndnorai, for all his size, did not stop to fight it out. Probably his recent wound, and the pain he was suffering, made him reluctant to risk an encounter with another armed man. It is uncanny how a wild animal is able to sense the presence of a human being who may spell danger and distinguish him from one who is helpless, unarmed, or bears no hostile thoughts.

The trail led through the belt of thick forest into lighter scrub, where it was more difficult to proceed, and then down a steep decline where the tiger had finally jumped into a narrow ravine, more a watercourse than anything else. Here I had to go down on hands and knees and within a few yards it became too dense to go farther. In any event, pursuit was fruitless as I could never hope to overtake my quarry under such conditions.

Disappointed as I was, two facts were now established beyond any doubt. Firstly, the Gowndnorai had not been totally blinded by

Ramiah's pellets. Therefore he remained a very real danger to the human race and would continue to be so till he completely recovered from his wounds and went back again to killing cattle and wild game. That was extremely unlikely to happen, however, as once a tiger has tasted human flesh and comes to realize how easy it is to kill a man, it rarely abandons the habit. In other words, here was a man-eater at the beginning of his dreadful career. Secondly, despite his enormous size, this tiger did not have a fighting heart, so he was likely to prove more cowardly, cunning, elusive and much more difficult to bring to book than most ordinary tigers, normally more daring and so liable to expose themselves.

How correct both my surmises were was revealed in a comparatively short time. My visit to Amligola could not be prolonged as I had to return to work to the aircraft plant in which I was employed at that time. So leaving instructions with Ramiah to keep me closely informed of events as they occurred, I returned to Bangalore the following morning.

It did not take long for Ramiah to write again. He related that the Gowndnorai had turned into a dangerous and elusive brute. No longer did he sun himself on the slopes of the small hillock, in full view of every passer-by. Now there was no sight of him, no sound to be heard. Only his huge, saucer-sized pug-marks betrayed his passing, and with each such visit some traveller, who had set out on a journey, failed to reach his destination.

Ramiah said that the tiger had taken to haunting the most lonely section of the footpath leading from Amligola to Tagarthy, from where he would snatch the last of a group of travellers. Apparently this had happened on three occasions, and now people shunned this track. They preferred to walk twenty-five miles by a circular route to Tagarthy.

Having covered the short cut many times myself, I knew exactly the spot to which Ramiah referred. It was a dip through a valley running between two low hills, where the vegetation consisted of tall bamboos and fairly heavy evergreen scrub that provided ideal cover in which a tiger could spring an ambush upon a group of passers-by.

I left for Tagarthy the next day, parked the car at the rest house of the forest department that stood in a beautifully wooded setting a mile away, and set out to cover the eight-mile footpath to Amligola, which would lead through what had become the valley of death, in which the Gowndnorai launched his attacks. It was exactly two in the afternoon when I started, and it was a cloudy, cool day. The conditions for a tiger to be early afoot were ideal.

I would have to progress slowly and carefully and timed my arrival at Amligola at about six o'clock or at most half an hour later,

just as it was getting too dark to see. To stay out after that would force the use of my torch, and realizing I was dealing with a very shy and crafty animal, I felt he was less likely to show himself then, and would probably prefer to launch his ambush at a time when he thought the traveller was unprepared.

For the first mile or so, the pathway traverses beautiful park-like country, and here peacocks, which had just begun to grow their new plumage after dropping their tail-feathers subsequent to the mating season, grubbed under the bushes and flapped heavily skywards as I appeared around a corner.

Gradually the vegetation grew more dense, the trees higher and the undergrowth thicker. After the second mile, I could only see the track ahead and snatch a quick glance around at it behind me. To my left and right a wall of impenetrable green hid everything more than a yard away from sight.

The dangerous valley about which I have spoken, where the Gowndnorai had thrice launched his ambushes, still lay three miles ahead, beginning at about the fifth mile along the track I had come, with another three miles to my destination, Amligola.

The closer I approached this valley, the more dense became the vegetation. Actually, this sort of jungle is not favoured by tigers as a rule, who prefer the park-like country I had already come through. Bison, elephant, sambar and barking deer are at home here, the felines choosing the more open jungles where their main prey, such as spotted deer, wild pig, and of course village cattle, graze on the plentiful grass that grows there. It was another indication of the Gowndnorai's craftiness that had induced him to change from the habit of his species to haunt a place affording him the maximum cover for his ambushes.

At last I tipped down the foot of the hill, the base of which marks the start of the valley of death. It is three-quarters of a mile, or perhaps seven furlongs, to the point where the *path* starts climbing the next hill, and dense bamboos with lush undergrowth press heavily upon the narrow trail on both sides.

I halted for a moment to pick up a handful of sand, which I raised to shoulder level and then allowed to trickle slowly from my fingertips. There was little breeze, but what there was carried the sand earthwards slightly to my left. The wind was therefore blowing from right to left, and the tiger, if he attacked, would almost certainly do so from the left-hand side of the track and not from the right. My deduction was based upon a fundamental law of the jungle.

Felines prey upon deer and such creatures as have a keen sense of smell. To do so upwind would render their stalk abortive, for the currents of air would betray their presence and their quarry would

escape. Carnivores have therefore learned by instinct always to approach downwind, that is against the wind, so that their own scent will not give them away before they can attack.

Unlike deer, the human being has practically no sense of smell so far as self-preservation is concerned, and the average person would not be able to scent a tiger or a panther, even in hiding a yard away, whatever the direction of the wind. But the feline does not know this and so applies the same rules to stalking a man as it would to stalking any other jungle creature. For this reason, I was almost sure that the Gowndnorai, if he came for me, would attack from the left;

and being the coward that he was, ten chances to one from behind me.

Having established all this by reasoning, I began to walk silently forwards along the track, alert for anything that might happen.

The first quarter-mile or so was fraught with apprehension. Every little while I glanced backwards to see if I was being followed. Once, as I looked back, I was in time to see a bush I had just passed sway violently, then come to rest.

I swung around. I knew that I could not see beneath the bush; it was far too thick. But I could watch the top of it. A tiger cannot spring out of the middle of a bush, it has to creep forwards to break clear of its branches before he makes its leap, and when it creeps the tops of the bushes will shake. If you keep watching the tops of the branches you will be able to see them move, then you will know it is coming.

Sure enough the top of one of the branches very near the edge of the pathway shook slightly as something brushed against its base. This is it, I said to myself, and raised the .405 to my shoulder.

A moment later the branch vibrated more noticeably and out walked a wild boar into full view. Seeing me suddenly, it swerved head-on, the bristles on its neck rising like spines, head bent low with tusks aimed at me, small red eyes looking upward angrily.

I felt like laughing, but sighed with relief. The fact of the boar appearing from my left indicated that the tiger was not in the immediate vicinity.

Noticing that I stood motionless and made no move towards him, the boar decided that I must be harmless after all, although something to be regarded with grave suspicion. With head still bent at an angle to keep me in view and charge if necessary, the pig crossed the track to plunge into the thickets on the right with a loud brushing of the leaves. The next instant it was gone.

This time I really sighed. I went on again, relief making me a trifle less cautious perhaps, and was soon within reach of the end of the valley. I saw nothing in front of me; I looked back, but nothing was there. I looked in front again, when something urged me to turn

around.

And there was the Gowndnorai, or rather his head, emerging from a wall of green to my left that I had just passed. Not a sound had he made. My rifle came to my shoulder and I squinted down the barrel.

But the tiger was no longer there to aim at. Instinct and his inherent cowardliness warned him that here was no defenceless passer-by. He vanished as silently as he came.

Confidence made me bold and I stepped forward to catch a glimpse of him, if possible. A low growl, and then the rustle of leaves several yards away in the undergrowth, told me that the big tiger would not stay to fight. He was running away.

I arrived at Amligola shortly before dark to recount my adventure to an astonished Ramiah.

I did not know quite what to do the next day. Ramiah said it was useless to tie out cattle as bait, for the Gowndnorai would not look at them. In any case, there were very few cattle in Amligola, and none of their owners would sell for this purpose. I would have to wait to walk back to Tagarthy the following morning if I wanted to buy a bait.

That afternoon the Gowndnorai broke his own rule. Perhaps he was over-hungry. Maybe he thought the valley was too dangerous for him to haunt for a while, with me in it. So he killed a man in the park-like jungle I have told you about, a mile or so from the Tagarthy forest rest house where I had left my car. The victim's three companions came hurriedly through the valley to bring me the news. They knew it was safe enough to traverse while the tiger was engaged in eating this kill. It was nearly three in the afternoon when they arrived and I had seven miles to cover to reach the site of the incident. We found what was left of the man a little after four-thirty.

The Gowndnorai had attacked his victim in the expected fashion from behind a bush, out of the centre of which grew a wild-cashew tree, killed him and carried him back to the same bush, behind which he had set to work and eaten more than half the body. The three men who had been walking in front of the victim had practically run the rest of the way to Amligola.

The wild-cashew tree growing on the spot was a very lucky factor. Its many branches and large leaves made the construction of a *machan* a quick and easy matter. Although I made a bet with myself that the Gowndnorai would never show up, because he was far too cunning for one thing, while the noise the men made in building the *machan,* in spite of all their efforts to work silently, must have been heard by him where he lay, probably not very far away, there was always the slimmest chance that he might appear. By six o'clock I was in the *machan,* quite a snug affair considering the short time in which

it had been made, and the three men hurried back the mile to Tagarthy which they had covered that morning in the company of the unfortunate man now lying mangled behind the bush.

This was the Indian spring and it soon began to grow dark. Within another hour the remains of the corpse on the ground beneath me was hidden from sight. There was no moonlight and I was relying upon the torch, clamped to the barrel of my rifle, to light the scene if the tiger returned.

All was silent for nearly an hour except for the calls of a few night-birds and the flapping of the large fruit bats around the tree. I glanced at the luminous dial of my watch. It was eight o'clock, the time when tigers generally return to their kills!

Almost punctually to the hour, a group of spotted deer began to call in alarm from the park-like jungle to the east. Their cries were dying away when an animal moved in the bush directly below me. The Gowndnorai had come. In another moment he could start to eat and then would be my chance.

This was precisely the moment when I heard a tiger growl, but it was at least a hundred yards or more away; certainly not below me. So the Gowndnorai had a companion!

This fact raised complications. Was this the man-eater after all? I remembered his cowardliness. Maybe another tiger was the true man-eater. Or perhaps both had the habit!

My thoughts were interrupted when the animal below me snarled; then dashed off at top speed. After that I heard neither of the tigers and thought they both had gone when, a few minutes before nine o'clock, a twig snapped and this was followed by the crunching of bones. One of the tigers had returned. So I slowly raised the rifle to my shoulder in preparation for a shot.

An instant later pandemonium broke out. A series of shattering roars came from the darkness a short distance behind me, a coughing snarl issued from directly below, and this was followed by the sound of a large body frantically clawing its way up the trunk of the tree upon which I was sitting. At about the same instant a second body crashed against the tree, which shook under the impact, and started tearing at the trunk.

The tree swayed as if struck by a hurricane and I felt I would be hurled out of the *machan*. Roars, growls and snarls from below my very feet threw me into panic. Hastily pointing the rifle-barrel downwards, I pressed the torch-button. The light cut through the night and fell upon a panther, only two feet below. But it was gazing downwards.

I moved the barrel slightly, and now, I looked into the blazing eyes of the Gowndnorai, who would never have had the courage to

attack the tree on which I was hiding had not the panther, stealing from the kill, thought fit to take refuge in it. Neither animal knew the tree was already occupied by me.

The first was an easy shot—between the eyes. The Gowndnorai fell backwards as his roars came to an end. So was the second. The panther looked up in startled amazement to provide another easy shot, also between the eyes. I could not afford to spare him, though I would have liked to do so. He had been eating from a human kill and might turn into a man-eater himself.

The Gowndnorai was perhaps the largest tiger I have ever shot; and surely the most cowardly.

Four

The Assassin of Diguvametta

If you were to travel in a southeasterly direction by metre- gauge railway from Guntakal junction in the state of Andhra Pradesh, you would pass the large town of Nandyal and shortly afterwards enter a delightful stretch of hilly country, heavily forested and intersected by numerous streams. Over these you would rattle, halting briefly at the jungle stations of Basavapuram and Chelama, and traversing two tunnels, one short and one extremely long. Finally you would cross a verdant valley by a picturesque high viaduct, with tree-tops far below. In a few miles you would probably observe a large stone water-column at the right-hand side of the line, always overflowing, next to which stands the 'outer' signal that heralds the advent of Diguvametta railway station, where the hills and the jungle end and the cultivated plains begin again.

The 'assassin's' operations extended from this station as far as the very long tunnel in the valley crossed by the long viaduct, but it was particularly active in the vicinity of the dripping water-column and the 'outer' signal beside it.

I have always had a sneaking fondness for the forests between Chelama and Diguvametta, not because they are particularly well stocked with game or carnivora, but for the utter peace and solitude of the area, and the friendly disposition of the wild Chenchu tribesmen who inhabit the extensive jungles in this section of the Eastern Ghats. I have found that even the ordinary villager of Andhra Pradesh is, on the whole, much more friendly than his counterpart in Mysore state, where I live, while the folk in Madras state reveal a disposition between the two.

Also, the nature of the vegetation here is quite different from that growing farther south, and while no elephants or bison occur, this area represents the southernmost limit where the nilgai or blue-bull, a large animal of the antelope species, looking like a sambar deer, is to be found.

So to Diguvametta I travelled by train one day, passing through the long tunnel and over the long bridge, both of which always held for me a childish fascination, skirting the signal and dripping water-column, to alight at Diguvametta with my small bedroll, campkit, and rifle. A couple of urchins grabbed the bedroll and campkit, and with my rifle slung over my shoulder, we began walking up the road that ran parallel to the railway track in the direction from which the train

had just come.

It was perhaps half a mile to the forest bungalow, a wonderfully cosy structure for so old a building; a plantation of teak seedlings lay to the south of it, the jungle lay east and north, while to the west was the road leading to the railway station, and after that again the railway-line, as I have just said. The signal and water-column stood a bare half-furlong away. My old friend, Aleem Khan the caretaker of the forest bungalow, welcomed me at the gate with his expansive smile, at the same time shouting to the urchins to get a move-on with my *samaans*.

The bungalow had two suites of rooms, and as usual Aleem was good enough to put me into the better one, the one that faced the road and the railway. It was better because the bathroom attached to this suite was fitted with a shower, while that on the other side had none.

Aleem was a Muslim and had only two wives, while so many of his co-religionists had four, the maximum allowed to a Mohammedan legally. He had told me once before that he felt that two were just enough. Without further ado he summoned these two women and set them to operate the hand-pump together. This contrivance drew water from a large well and fed it to a zinc water-tank situated on the roof of my bathroom. For half an hour, while I unpacked and then drank tea, hastily prepared for me by the caretaker, I could hear the clank-clank-clank of the hand-pump, and the chatter of the two wives as they argued with each other and then started to quarrel, each accusing the other of shirking her bit of the pumping. The dispute was brought to an end by the sound of water pouring off the bathroom roof. The tank had been filled to capacity!

Then came the much anticipated pleasure of a shower bath, or rather a series of shower baths, one after the other, the cool water trickling over my body in fine jets. Outside the temperature was well over 100° F as the sun shone down with the merciless intensity usual to Andhra, but inside that bathroom it was so cool, so damp, so heavenly. I smiled maliciously to think I was so callously wasting the precious liquid those two women had worked so hard to pump for me.

Refreshed, and stretched at length in an armchair on the veranda, I drew placidly on my pipe and drank mug after mug of tea. A goods train clanked past heavily, an engine at either end, the one in the front blasting clouds of black smoke from its funnel and tugging for all it was worth, while the one at the back came along unconcernedly, as if there was nothing to bother about at all.

Aleem Khan squatted on his heels on the ground at the side of my armchair, telling me some of his family troubles. His only sister had lost her husband, a forest guard who had died suddenly of tuberculosis, leaving his wife and two children unprovided for. They

had immediately come to Aleem for shelter and the problem was now a major one. Aleem's first wife had three children, the second had two; and now his sister with her two children and himself made a total of four adults and seven children to be fed on his meagre salary.

Could I do something about it? Aleem confided that, in spite of her two children, his sister was still a comely lass, good to look upon, with a fine figure, amiable disposition, and all the attributes required to make a very desirable wife. In a moment of temptation, I closed my eyes and let my thoughts run wild. What fun it would be for me to announce my conversion to Mohammedanism! I could then marry Aleem's sister and take two more wives into the bargain. With the one back in Bangalore, this would make the fully permissible four.

Then the expense side of the question hit me a sharp blow, and the troubles that would follow as a consequence hit me a sharper one. I opened my eyes in horror to think of what a predicament I was in, and then smiled when I remembered it was all in the realm of speculation.

Hastily I told Aleem I would inquire in Bangalore for a suitable candidate, and then, equally hastily, changed the topic. Were there any tigers or panthers about?

A tiger had been poached just ten days ago he confided, by some government official in a jeep, using a spotlight, on the forest department's fire-line two hundred yards from the rest house. This fire-line, I must tell you, extended from west to east. It began at the road to the northwest of the bungalow and a furlong away, and went on in an easterly direction to another road two miles distant that traversed the forest and connected Diguvametta to a hamlet named Gondacheruvu, some forty miles away.

Aleem also mentioned that there was a panther about, and this animal was beginning to prove troublesome. Its pug-marks could be seen early in the morning around the rest house, and it had taken his dog three weeks earlier from the place where it had been sleeping on the back veranda. He added that his sister had not only brought her two children but her dog as well, and this the panther had attacked immediately outside the door of the outhouse that Aleem had allowed his sister to occupy. But this animal, unusually big for a village cur, had also a big heart. He had turned on the panther with such ferocity that the latter had fled precipitately with the cur in hot pursuit. Both Aleem and his sister had witnessed the scene in the bright moonlight.

Nevertheless, the caretaker said he was not happy about matters and felt the panther would summon up enough courage to return and would eventually get the dog. But what really troubled him was the presence of the seven children, two of whom were mere toddlers. Should the panther become sufficiently bold—or hungry—he might be

tempted to run off with one of them.

Many people have asked me why I do not leave India and go to England, Australia or even Canada. I have tried to answer that question, but I do not think I have convinced anybody. This thought returned to me as I lay in the armchair that afternoon at Diguvametta. Where in England, Australia or Canada, where anywhere else in the world, except perhaps Africa or South America, would I find the conditions of India? A journey by train or road of a few hours separated my home in Bangalore from the cold climate to be found on any of the several mountain ranges that lay within two hundred miles, or from the swelteringly hot weather of the plains that lay even closer; from the dense forests to the west, with their very heavy rainfall, and the extremely arid, semi-desert areas to the east; from the teeming millions of one of the cities and the utter solitude of a jungle within fifty miles of home; from the varied languages and dialects of the towns and the almost incoherent vocabularies of the forest tribes; from the safety and comfort of home and the ever-present hazards of death from a sudden sickness, snakebite or some wild animal. Where in the world would time be of so little, if any consequence, as in India? Where in the world would consequences themselves be of so little importance? It matters not how you dress, or whether you dress at all! The bare requirements of existence are all that do matter. Everything else is thrown in along with that, sometimes in good measure and sometimes scarcely at all; but really it does not make much difference either way and there is never any hurry about anything. There is a time to be born and a time to die and each event is as inevitable as the other. Moreover, death follows life and life follows death, so it really does not matter where you start and where you end, as it all works out to the same thing.

My friends cannot understand when I tell them that these things are the reasons why I love India, why I do not think I shall ever leave it.

My reverie was broken by trouble in the form of the forest range officer, who arrived on a bicycle to inform Aleem Khan that word had just been received that the district forest officer (D.F.O.) was passing through Diguvametta and would spend the next night at the rest house. Did I have written permission to occupy the bungalow?

I had to reply in the negative, and the range officer looked aghast. I had committed the unpardonable crime of trespass. I was occupying a government building without permission. He swallowed hard and then told me I would have to get out forthwith.

Here was the same difficulty that I had experienced in so many forest bungalows in so many jungles. This is why I have purchased so many parcels of land in so many areas, in order to be able to camp in

peace without being troubled by authority, that ever-present bogy that has stalked the length and breadth of the country from time immemorial, that stalked it during the days of the British Raj and that dominates it even more since Independence.

I flattered the range officer and in no time he was eating out of my hand. Certainly, sir, he agreed, these senior officers coming on tour were a damned nuisance. Why (and being the gentleman that he knew I was, he could tell me in confidence), they did not work at all when they came. It was he and his subordinates who were the workers. These visits were only a pretext for collecting *batta,* the colloquial name for a travelling allowance, when they were hard up. Witness the fact that these 'tours' invariably took place during the last week of a month. Certainly, I could remain for the night in the bungalow, but I must promise faithfully to go before noon the following day or he would be in grave trouble should the D.F.O. find me occupying the bungalow without permission.

I promised, and then inquired if there was a vacant room anywhere in the village. The range officer did not think so.

At this stage in the conversation I mentioned that I had suffered similarly in so many other areas that I had begun purchasing small plots of land in nearly every jungle I visited and had at that moment over twenty camp sites of my own. He brightened at this idea. He had a friend, he said, in the revenue department, who owned many acres of land just beyond the railway station. Upon his recommendation, the ranger was sure this friend, whose name was Ranga Reddy, would be glad to present me with a small plot of land all my own, big enough to pitch a tent upon, as a gift and free of all charges.

Within the hour we were at this friend's place. There we drank coffee and were forced to consume two *dosais* [1] each. Then Ranga Reddy took us to his land, which was a quarter of a mile beyond the railway station and to the east of the line, and invited me to select any spot I fancied, anywhere I wished and to the extent required.

The field was good agricultural land, consisting of rich black soil, and we had to go to the far corner to find a vacant bit, lying fallow and with earth that was not quite so rich as the rest of the field. After all, I required only a camping site and did not want to deprive my new friend of anything of value. A stream flowed a short distance away, while the main road bordered the plot on one side. An ideal camping-site! Ten cents of land would be ample for my requirements.

I told the owner of my choice. He answered with an expansive smile that I could certainly have the land. He would take me in his jeep the following day to the town of Giddalur, twelve miles away, where the formal registration of my ownership would have to be made.

I asked the price. Free, of course, he replied. This would never do, I answered. Besides, it would not constitute a legal purchase; he must accept some price. With hesitation, Mr Reddy said 'Five rupees,' and I said,' 'No, take fifty.'

He recoiled in horror. 'Take fifty rupees from a friend for such a useless plot of land!' Eventually we agreed to thirty rupees, which is less than two pounds in English currency.

The next morning we were at the registrar's office at Giddalur when it opened for business. Half an hour later I was the proud owner of my own camp site of ten cents of land at Diguvametta!

However, I have anticipated events a little by telling you about the purchase of the site. I should have related, in proper sequence of events, what happened on the night after I had returned to the rest house from a short stroll along the fire-line where the tiger had been shot so recently. This fire-line traversed a deep *nullah* that formed the bed of a running stream where the flow of water, now that the dry season prevailed, was not more than a yard wide. Implanted in the mud on both sides were the pug-marks of a medium-sized panther. This animal, like all its kind, had been loath to walk in the water, and so it had jumped across.

I wondered if it could be the animal Aleem had told me about. The tracks led towards the forest lodge and had probably been made the previous night. Then I stooped to examine them more closely and changed my mind. The dark-green layer of surface fungus that borders old watercourses and streams in some places grew to the water's edge on both banks, and it had been pressed down by the weight of the panther both on the side from which the animal had jumped and, considerably more deeply, upon the bank where it had landed. The fact that the dark green fungus was still pressed down on both sides was very significant. Why had it not returned to the upright position of the fungus elsewhere? It would have done so had the panther made its leap the previous night, as I had first thought. There could be only one conclusion: the facts clearly showed that the panther had crossed not more than an hour or two earlier.

It was now after six in the evening, so the animal must have passed this way between four and five, long before sunset. In this case it would be in the vicinity of the bungalow right now, unless it had gone on to cross the railway track in the direction of the water-tank. I turned back from my walk, wondering if I would hear it calling during the night.

I had just sat down to an early dinner of cold roast beef that I had brought from home when it happened. The time was exactly 7.45 p.m.; I remember this because I had just wound my watch, a habit I follow as I sit down to dinner. Aleem's sister's dog had made itself

friendly and was sitting on its haunches by my chair, gazing soulfully at me in anticipation of receiving scraps from my plate. I gave it a piece of dried chuppatty.

Most dogs would have gulped the morsel and looked for more, but this creature, in common with all village curs, decided to take the mouthful outside and enjoy it in solitude. It ran out on to the veranda, and then I heard a low snarl, followed by a loud yelp from the dog.

My rifle was in the bedroom that led off from the central dining-room, and there was no time to get it. Realizing that the panther had struck and that if I wanted to save the dog I would have to act fast, I rushed on to the veranda where I was just in time to see in the moonlight a spotted form leap down from the raised plinth on which the veranda stood, with the dog in its jaws, still alive and struggling.

Shouting loudly to frighten the attacker, I hurled the first missile that came to hand at the slouching form, one of the hard wooden chairs with which all government buildings are furnished. The departing leopard was only fifteen feet away when the chair descended squarely upon it, but the panther did not let the poor dog go. On the contrary it began to bound away with the dog still held firmly.

I rushed back into the bedroom for my rifle, hastily loaded it, and followed in the direction taken by the panther. Bright moonlight lit the compound, and so I had not waited to attach my torch-equipment to the weapon. That would have taken time, and not a second was to be wasted if I were to try to save the dog.

It was quite a different matter, however, when I reached the jungle that flanked the bungalow's grounds. Darkness, cast by the foliage of the trees, enveloped me, relieved here and there by shafts of moonlight. I soon realized that to crash about in the underbrush and darkness would only serve to frighten the panther and make it carry the victim farther away. In any case, it was too late for me to save the dog's life. So I sat down in the shadows at the foot of a tree, annoyed with myself for not having fixed my torch to the rifle. It would have taken time to do so, but at least I would have been able to see.

The panther, realizing I had stopped chasing it, must have thought I had gone away, for within ten minutes it began to eat. Nor was it very far away, for I could hear its low growl now and then, alternating with the sound of tearing flesh and the crack of a bone. I was undecided whether to try to creep up to the beast or go back to the bungalow for my torch, and as so often happens when one is undecided, I chose to do the wrong thing.

Rising to my feet slowly, and treading cautiously in the darkness for fear of making any sound, I tiptoed towards the noises that reached me now and then, adopting the old hunter's practice of only

moving while the sounds lasted, and stopping as soon as they ceased. For when an animal you are trying to stalk is eating or making a noise of any kind there is less chance of his being able to hear the sounds that you might make, however slight they may be, in your approach, but it would be much more likely to hear you if it were silent.

I came quite near the panther that night. I do not think it could have been more than five yards away when luck, that had helped me so far, decided to put a spoke in the wheel. Incidentally, it sealed the fate of three innocent people. A bear, pig or pangolin had dug a hole in the ground. In the darkness I did not see it and put my left foot right into that hole, bringing me down with a jerk. I stumbled forward, and the panther knew I was there. With a coughing snarl he was away, and I heard him bounding through the bushes.

Extricating myself, I went on till I found the body of the dog which the panther had started to feed upon. I could make out its form as a light blur against the darkness of the ground. When I returned to the rest house, Aleem and his family had come out, searching for the dog and wondering where I had gone.

I fixed my torch on to the barrel of the .405 then, and returned with the caretaker. Only a fourth of the dog had been eaten. Aleem carried the remains back to the bungalow, where he said he would bury them in the morning, while I decided to try to search for the panther.

It was easier now to wander in the jungle with the help of my torch, and I scoured the area right around the building within the radius of a furlong for over two hours. No sign of the panther did I see, while the presence of a small sounder of pigs showed that the spotted cat had moved away from this area completely. On the other side of the road and bordering the railway track close to the signal, a few spotted deer and a solitary nilgai cow grazed in peace, suddenly shattered by a shrill whistle of an engine and the heavy rumble of a goods train.

The panther had gone. There was considerable weeping on the part of the women and children when what was left of the dog was buried the next morning. A little later, as agreed, I moved out of the rest house, stopping at the ranger's quarters to borrow an old tent that he had promised to lend me.

Within two hours the tent had been pitched and a camp made on my new site. Two mud-pots, purchased in the marketplace and stored in a corner of the tent, served for drinking and washing water. Two fireplaces, built with stones and placed outside the tent, were ample for my needs, one for brewing tea and the other for cooking food. The earth was my bed; the stream not far away was my source of water, both for drinking and bathing; a small lantern was my illumination at

night. What more did I need? Free to come and go as and when I liked! At least, as far as Diguvametta was concerned, I was henceforth rid of officials and government rules and regulations for evermore. Happy was I and very contented.

There was just one thing that could go wrong. If it happened to rain, the black-cotton soil would be churned into a sticky quagmire. I had not brought a campcot as I had intended to stay at the forest bungalow. So I would, literally, be in a mess.

Early that afternoon, after I had returned from Giddalur, a jeep came tearing down the road, and as it flashed past my tent I read 'Andhra forest department' in large white lettering on boards both behind and in front. The dark face of the occupant next to the driver stared at me hard. The district forest officer had arrived!

Later in the evening I called at the rest house on a courtesy visit. As much as I dislike government officials, one has to keep in touch with them in India if one wants to move about freely.

The D.F.O. was a young man, practically new to the service, and had been recruited directly to the department after passing through college, followed by training and a departmental examination at one of the provincial centres. Very soon I discovered that he knew nothing whatever about the jungle fauna and that he harboured the usual vague ideas regarding the terrible ferocity of tigers and panthers.

Aleem had told him what had happened to the dog the previous night without disclosing my part in the story or, most important of all, the fact that I had been occupying the bungalow.

So the D.F.O. in his turn now related to me a highly embellished account of the incident, including how the panther had leapt upon Aleem's breast and carried away the dog that had been sleeping there, to all of which I listened with an innocent, not to say surprised, expression. Apparently it did not occur to him that people ordinarily do not sleep with great hefty dogs upon their chests.

However, the upshot was that the D.F.O. invited me to shoot the panther. He inquired where I was staying and was markedly surprised to hear I was the owner of ten tents and was camping on my own site. Very generously, he suggested I should occupy the other half of the bungalow and enjoy its comforts.

Hanging my head in shame, I reminded him that I did not have 'official permission to occupy the Government forest lodge,' and slyly added that the rules of his department were very strict on this point. Permission could only be granted by the conservator of forests or by the collector of the district.

My new friend was offended. Was not he the D.F.O.? Was his permission not good enough? To hell with the conservator and the collector! 'You come along to the bungalow right away,' he said; 'we'll

have dinner together tonight.'

So I came back where I started, but now as a guest, having left rather in the fashion of a vagabond. Moreover, but this I am sure was pure luck, I was installed once more in the western or shower-bath side of the building. And it was fortunate, indeed, that I returned to the shelter of the bungalow just in time, for that night we had a heavy downpour. Next morning, my campsite was a sea of black mud.

The D.F.O. made Aleem bring a dog from the village, at Aleem's own suggestion and much against my desire, and instructed the caretaker to chain it to a teak-sapling that grew about ten yards behind the building. He was keen that I should bag the marauder. I dislike using dogs as bait. They are far too sensitive and suffer an agony of apprehension when chained up, as they appear to realize the danger they are in.

The D.F.O. had no firearm, but sat with me on another chair inside the dining-room. By keeping the door half-open we could see every detail outside in the clear moonlight, while the panther might not be able to see us in the darkness of the dining-room.

You may be sure that I kept a sharp lookout, for I did not want the dog to be killed. The cur, on its part, realizing the danger and feeling the discomfort of the chill air, began to yelp and whine loudly. The panther, if it happened to be anywhere within half a mile or even more at this moment, would certainly hear it.

The D.F.O. began to doze shortly after 11 p.m., and retired to his bed before midnight. Soon after two o'clock in the morning, with the moon behind the trees, long shadows began to fall and hide the dog, which had resigned itself to its fate. It had stopped yelping and was curled up fast asleep, and out of my sight. Should the panther attack now, I certainly would not be able to save the mongrel from being killed. Yet I hesitated till the moon disappeared behind the jungle to the west and it became pitch-dark. Then I got up from my chair, untied the dog, who wagged its tail joyously on seeing me, brought it indoors, and went to sleep myself.

After lunch the next day the D.F.O. departed on his return journey to Nandyal, while I left by the midnight train after giving my Bangalore address to Aleem, along with a couple of stamped postal covers which I always carry about with me for just such a purpose, instructing the caretaker to write to me should any unusual event occur. I had a hunch that I had not heard the last of that panther. But I forgot all about the affair before I even reached my journey's end.

It came as a surprise when Aleem's letter reached me about four months later, stating that a railway ganger had been killed by a wild animal midway between the long bridge and the water-column with the 'outer' signal close beside it. The letter said that no tracks could be

found and that the ganger's body had been partly devoured. Then it went on to explain that there was a division of opinion as to what kind of beast had perpetrated the crime. Some said the killer was a tiger; others said it was a sloth bear. A few supersititious people blamed an evil spirit, but Aleem himself thought it was the panther. Would I come and shoot the creature, whatever it might turn out to be?

I answered, saying that as the killing was an old one and might be merely the odd result of a chance meeting with an irate bear, my visit to Diguvametta would be of no use just then; but I impressed upon him to write again should anything further transpire.

The next letter came about a month later. This reported that the ganger in charge of the water-column had made a practice of returning to the railway station by sunset. Invariably he and another ganger, whose duty it was to light the oil-lamp serving the 'outer' signal at precisely six o'clock every evening would meet at the foot of the signal and return together. This had been their regular habit ever since the two had become friends.

On the evening before that on which the letter was written, however, this meeting had failed to materialize. The second ganger had lighted the lamp on the signal, came down the iron ladder and found no signs of his friend from the water-tank, who should have been waiting for him there. Thinking the fellow must have fallen asleep, he called his name loudly, 'Ram! Ram!'

No answer had come, so the second ganger, apprehending no danger, had gone in search of his companion. He came upon the body at the base of the stone structure that supported the cast-iron tank of the water-column. Not much of it had been eaten: just a little from the chest. And although it was after six o'clock, there was still light enough for him to see in the sodden earth, saturated by the overflow from the water tank, a number of pug-marks, crossing and re-crossing each other. They had been made by a panther.

The ganger took to his heels and did not stop running till he had reached the station.

'Come at once,' Aleem's letter concluded urgently. 'A man-eating panther is amongst us!'

Unfortunately, I had urgent engagements that day, so I decided to leave early next morning, travelling by car so as to avoid delay and in order to carry the tent, stores and all the other kit that I would require for living on my camp site. I did not want to risk again the nuisance of being ousted from the bungalow in the midst of my operations. Moreover, when hunting a man-eater, particularly a panther, one cannot possibly conform to government rules that limits one's stay in a travellers' bungalow or a forest rest house to not more

than three days.

I had just returned that evening, completed my packing and was about to have dinner, when I heard a bicycle bell outside. Then Thangavelu, my servant, came in with a telegram and the messenger's delivery book for my signature.

Hastily I signed and tore open the cover of the telegram to get one of the most unpleasant shocks I have ever received: 'Panther killed sister's child. Come immediately. Aleem.'

Before dawn I was on my way.

If you ever go to the forest rest house at Diguvametta, at the southeastern corner of the building and within twenty yards of it, you will come across a little grave under a stone slab. Inscribed on the stone is the one word: 'Mischief.'

The story goes that many years ago, in the days of the British Raj, a visiting British forest officer, or it may have been a collector, was occupying the bungalow along with his little dog whose name was 'Mischief.' A panther had suddenly pounced upon the latter and was carrying it away when the Englishman fired, killing both the panther and his own dog with the spreading shot from his gun. In sorrow, and in memory of his pet, this officer had buried it where it had been killed and had later returned, bringing an engraved tombstone to place over the spot.

Aleem told me the story of the latest tragedy as I was getting out of my car. His sister's elder child, who was a girl, had been told the story of 'Mischief and had formed the habit of placing a little bunch of jungle flowers early each morning on the grave. That morning, for some reason, she had forgotten to put the flowers she had gathered on the stone slab, but only remembered late in the evening when it was almost dark. Meanwhile, the little bunch of flowers had withered noticeably.

'Peearree,' which was the girl's name, had told her mother, Aleem's sister, about her omission and said she would put the flowers on the grave at once. Her mother had answered that it was growing dark and the man-eater would catch her. Besides, the flowers were already withered; she could put fresh flowers on the grave the next morning.

Without heeding, Peearree had grabbed the dying flowers and dashed out. She must have reached her destination, for the little bunch was found there. Nobody had heard a sound; neither a scream, nor a whimper, nor a growl. The child did not come back.

Alarmed, her mother had called out to her, but receiving no answer summoned Aleem and his two wives from the adjoining room. The caretaker snatched up a stick and the four of them, carrying a couple of lanterns, went to the small grave, where they found the

flowers, but of the little girl herself, no trace. A few feet away lay a scattered heap of glass beads, and the string on which they had been threaded. And, of course, a little farther on, a few drops of blood!

Aleem and the three women had hurried to the village, to return considerably later with the ranger, a couple of forest guards, and quite a number of people armed with hatchets, sticks, knives and lanterns. Nobody had a gun.

They searched the undergrowth rather haphazardly that night without result, because everyone feared the panther. Next morning, they had looked again. This time they found the killer's pug-marks, and the marks left by the child's body where it had been hauled through the thicker bushes. They even found some tattered remnants of clothing. After that, all signs of man-eater and victim had vanished.

Aleem said I should stay in the rest house and not expose myself to risk from attack by the panther while in my tent. This I resolutely refused to do till he tempted me with an idea, as brave as it was dangerous. He offered to sit on Mischief's tombstone all night as bait, if I agreed to lie prone upon the veranda with my rifle, hidden behind a pillar. He said he would call softly, as soon as he felt the panther's presence. I could then switch on my torch, play the beam around, pick up the animal's eyes or form in the light and shoot it. There was no moon at this time, the nights were totally dark.

Aleem's was a magnificently brave, but an utterly absurd and foolish plan. As if he would ever feel the man-eater's presence in time to warn me before it attacked him! He would feel nothing till it was upon him, and then it would be too late. What was worse, I would not be able to fire, for if I did so, I would possibly hit him and not the panther. Even supposing Aleem sensed the panther coming and called to me, the man-eater would never show up.

'No!' I kept repeating, 'No, no, no!' But at the same time I was thinking that Aleem's scheme had possibilities and they gave me an idea: there was nothing to prevent me from dressing in Indian clothing and sitting on Mischief's grave! My usual attire might scare the man-eater away, as panthers are inordinately cunning and clever, but Indian garb would deceive him. No other party being endangered, no charge of manslaughter could be brought against me; nor could there be any idea of suicide. Should the man-eater come, and should I not be aware of it beforehand, the question of suicide could not arise, for the very simple reason that I would not be present to answer the charge. So I told Aleem of my scheme and now it was his turn to remonstrate.

I had my way, however, as I usually do in these matters, and sunset found me seated on Mischief's tombstone with crossed legs, dressed in Aleem's dirtiest clothing, my face and hands blackened with

charcoal, and a filthy rag tied round my forehead to emulate a turban. The rifle lay inconspicuously on the ground close at hand, with the torch clamped to it, covered with a light layer of leaves so that the man-eater might not notice it. You may be certain I took good care to sit with my back towards the rest house so that I could watch the jungle on three sides.

The sunset hour and the corresponding break of day are the most delightful moments to be in a forest to anybody fascinated by the jungle and the wild creatures that inhabit it, for it is at these times that one hears the songs of the birds of the day at their best. The creatures and birds of the night seem to take the cue from their brethren of the day, and their calls of welcome to the hours of darkness that lie ahead mingle with those of their roosting fellows, to fade away correspondingly at break of day.

But I had no ears for such music at this moment, enchanting as it always is to me, for my ears, mind and nerves were attuned for the coming of the killer. Now was the hour, the sunset hour, when it would be afoot. It was at precisely this moment that it had taken poor little Peearree, and there was every likelihood that it would revisit the place where it had killed her in the hope of finding another victim. Thoughts such as these came into my mind and filled me with an ever-growing sense of danger.

It was soon quite dark. The rest house behind me, although so close, was a mere shapeless blur against the blacker background of the jungle behind it. Overhead, the stars twinkled here and there in the open spaces between the tree-tops that swayed slightly to the faint breeze. A short distance away a tall clump of bamboos reached heavenwards, the tops of their giant feathery culms drooping back to earth again in all directions like a graceful but huge bouquet.

Then I heard a faint rustle a little to my left. Very soon I heard it again, coming, it seemed, from a bush a few feet away. I strained my eyes but could see nothing but the blob of deeper blackness that was the bush against the blackness of the jungle beyond. My hand grasped the loaded rifle, kept ready at my feet, and in a lightning-swift motion the butt was at my shoulder and my left thumb was pressed hard upon the switch. A bright beam cut through the darkness to reflect tiny eyes that gazed back at me, brilliant as rubies, in innocent resentment. What I thought to be the man-eater turned out to be one of those huge black scorpions, common in India and particularly in Andhra state, rustling the dry leaves in its search for grubs.

These creatures grow to a length of eight inches, vary between jet black and very dark green in colour, are covered with short, bristly hairs, have a tremendous crab-like pair of pincerclaws before them and a long segmented tail, with a needlesharp point at its end. The

sting of this creature brings with it intense agony for twenty-four hours and death to such of its victims as may suffer from a weak heart.

The scorpion halted in its tracks when the light fell upon it and hissed audibly with vexation. I picked up a handful of earth and tossed it at the scorpion, which hissed again before scurrying away. Then I switched off the torch, replaced the rifle carefully on the ground at my feet and, groping for the leaves I had displaced, lightly covered it once again, cursing under my breath.

The whole incident was most unfortunate. The scorpion had made me reveal my position by shining my torch. If the panther had been anywhere near by it would have seen the light, and with the uncanny instinct of man-eaters who can sense when they are being hunted, the beast would beat a hasty retreat and now be far away.

It is said that scorpions have more than two eyes. I began to wonder if this was so and which of its eyes could have caught and reflected my torch-beam, when I heard the whistle of an engine as it rounded the bend just before reaching the outer signal. The goods train rumbled to a grinding halt and the engine-driver started to whistle again, first in short, rapid bursts and then in a prolonged blast that disturbed the whole jungle. I could hear voices too, the driver and his firemen talking to each other. They seemed to be unduly excited and were making quite a lot of noise.

I began to wonder what it could be all about when what I thought to be the solution came to me. The 'outer' signal must be 'up,' against the train entering the station, because the down passenger on its way to Nandyal was coming in from the opposite direction. This meant it was midnight and time had passed much faster than I expected.

The sound of human voices continued while I heard the distant hooting of the passenger train's engine, followed by the sound of its arrival at the station. The goods train driver now whistled and started his train, which clanked slowly along. A few minutes later, the down passenger drummed by as it picked up speed on its journey to Nandyal.

The quiet that I had expected would follow did not materialize, however, for soon I heard voices again, which grew louder as a group of men carrying a couple of lanterns turned in at the gate of the rest house and approached the building. Annoyed because all hope of shooting the man-eater was now gone, I rose from Mischief's grave and approached the veranda, where I was joined by Aleem, who had been awake and listening. The party turned out to comprise the stationmaster, the ranger, and the driver, guard and one of the firemen of the goods train.

They were all worked up and told how, upon coming out of the long tunnel, the headlight on the engine had revealed what looked like a crumpled human body lying at the side of the track. Observing this, the driver had concluded that one of the earlier trains must have knocked over some man who had attempted to cross the line, and as his train was moving slowly at the time, he decided to stop and investigate, lest the blame of having killed the man be put on him later. To his dismay, however, the driver and his firemen discovered that the man had not been run over at all. On the other hand, he had been devoured by some animal, as was evident from the fact that his gnawed bones lay scattered around.

The train guard, who had joined them by this time, suggested the body might be that of some wandering Chenchu tribesman, as it was clothed only in a *loincloth*. Having heard of the depredations of the panther, the driver and his companions decided to inform the stationmaster at Diguvametta, who could report the incident by telegram to the authorities. This they had done when the stationmaster, knowing I was at hand and had come to shoot the man-eater, resolved to inform the ranger and me first, before sending out his message.

So I had been right! The panther was, indeed, far away. Perhaps it had never been near the bungalow that night. Perhaps it had come at just about the time when the big scorpion had given me a false alarm. Maybe it had seen my torchlight, scurried away, met the Chenchu near the tunnel and killed him. But this was hardly possible, considering the distance of the tunnel from where I was sitting. As likely as not the Chenchu was a traveller who had not heard about the man-eater, or perhaps he had heard and for that reason had decided to sleep inside the tunnel, thinking it a safe place where the panther would never come.

I thanked my informers and said I would do what I could. After they had departed, as there was no point in remaining any longer by the grave, I determined to snatch a little sleep, instructing Aleem to wake me after four o'clock.

He must have remained awake, for it was a few minutes to four when he called me. We brewed tea and munched a few biscuits, after which we set out in darkness, walking in single file along the railway track. Had the man-eater been a tiger, to have done this would have been extremely dangerous, for a man-eating tiger nearly always carries away the person last in line. With a panther the risk was less: the more timid, but also more cunning, it waits for the victim who is alone and helpless before launching its attack, avoiding showing itself when more than one person is present.

Dawn was just about to break when we reached the long bridge.

Here we had to wait for about ten minutes before it became bright enough to attempt a crossing as this was a tricky business, involving stepping from sleeper to sleeper between the lines. One did not dare to look too much at the valley and the tree-tops far below as we glimpsed them through the open spaces between the sleepers.

It seemed an endless distance to the other end, but we made it eventually. Not far away was the yawning black hole that was the tunnel's entrance. Just before reaching it, on our left and close to the track, lay the mangled remains of what had been a Chenchu.

Examination showed that the man-eater must have returned to its meal, either after the goods train had passed or later perhaps, after the passenger train had gone in the opposite direction, for much more of the body had been eaten than had been reported to me. The head, feet and hands were now severed from the trunk and lay scattered about, leaving just a possibility, though not a strong one, that the man-eater might return.

Our thoughts were rudely disturbed just then by the rumbling sound as of distant thunder. It issued from the mouth of the tunnel, growing momentarily louder till it became a continuous roar. The up morning passenger train to Diguvametta was approaching. Making up my mind quickly and calling to Aleem to follow, I ran a few yards from the tunnel up the track to give the driver a chance to see me, stood between the rails and began to wave frantically as the front of the engine, in billows of smoke, dashed out of the tunnel.

The train was moving fast when the driver saw me. He applied his brakes while I skipped clear of the lines, but half the train had passed before it could be brought to a halt. I explained the situation briefly to the driver and guard who came running from both ends of the train, and asked them to take Aleem along and tell the stationmaster at Diguvametta to ask the ranger to issue orders through the local police, forbidding anybody to approach the bridge or tunnel that night. I intended to await the man-eater's possible return. To Aleem I gave hasty instructions, asking him to return with food, tea and blankets for both of us. A down passenger was due to pass shortly after 2 p.m., and he could safely come by it.

While I was speaking, a large number of passengers had crowded around, wanting to know what was going on. Some of these now insisted upon going to look at the corpse, so that it was over fifteen minutes before the driver could continue his journey. I watched the train as it clanked over the long bridge and disappeared around the curve.

In an incredibly short time the vultures discovered the remains. At first one appeared as a speck in the sky high above me, soon followed by other specks. Then came the loud rustle of air through

their wing-feathers as they swooped to earth to alight heavily a few feet from their prospective feast, towards which they began to waddle in ungainly fashion.

Squatting at the mouth of the tunnel, I had an abundant supply of ammunition in the gravel ballast of the line. I hurled the stones at the venturesome vultures, and from such close range I managed to score a fair number of direct hits which served to keep the unwelcome birds at bay. All this helped to pass the time and an up goods train to Duguvametta roared through the tunnel without the driver noticing me, squatting to one side of the mouth, or the scattered remains of the Chenchu, though he could not have failed to observe the abnormal number of vultures that gathered on both sides of the track.

The section is not a busy one and no other trains came through till the arrival of the down passenger shortly after two o'clock, bringing Aleem, the tea, my lunch and a blanket for each of us for the night. The driver stopped his train for Aleem to alight and then stepped down himself, with his firemen and, of course, the guard and a crowd of passengers, to view the cadaver which by now was smelling strongly.

Amidst cries of 'good luck' the train rumbled away again, followed an hour later by a goods train, after which we were left to our own devices. The vultures had by now abandoned their task as hopeless and had flown dejectedly away, leaving us to make our plans for the night.

There were two possible places in which to hide. The first was the mouth of the tunnel itself; the second, somewhere above the entrance. To determine which would be the less likely of the two hiding places to be discovered, I put myself in the man-eater's place. Instinct, and a long association with the locality would have conditioned it to the fact that huge monstrosities, rumbling and roaring and billowing smoke, every now and then issued from the hole in the earth. So it would certainly watch the hole very carefully and for a long time before daring to show itself; in the course of this close scrutiny it would very likely discover us, for I would have to keep Aleem with me. There was nowhere to send him away to, and it would be most dangerous to ask him to return home unarmed.

The conclusion we reached therefore was obvious: we would hide somewhere on the hillside, as close as possible above the mouth of the tunnel, hoping that the panther would keep to the general rule of not looking upwards for an enemy. The ground above the entrance to the tunnel sloped gradually and was mostly covered with coarse grass and weeds with a stumpy tree here and there. It was quite rocky and boulders lay scattered around in profusion, varying in size from a football to the height of a man.

Grateful for the luck afforded by this cover, it did not take us long, working together, to construct a small buttress of boulders which we placed in line a little above the entrance to the tunnel-mouth in the form of a wall high enough to conceal us when lying prone behind it. Between these boulders we allowed enough space for two loopholes, one for Aleem and the other for myself, through which to keep close watch upon the remains at the side of the track below us, and a little of the terrain around it. For a wider view, and to take a shot, I would have to look over the top of the rough stone parapet we had constructed. If I were to try poking the rifle through the aperture, I might make some sound if the barrel struck against the stone. The panther would hear this, look up and spot us. The one disadvantage of our situation was that we were lying at a downward-sloping angle, with our heels at a higher level than our heads.

We were in place by four o'clock, with the sun still blazing down upon us and the ground fire-hot beneath. We lay on our blankets, but these soon became unbearably warm, while the disadvantage of the downward slope now began to make itself felt. I suppose, because of the steady accumulation of blood in my chest and head, rather than in equal distribution over my whole body, I began to experience an uncomfortably stuffy sensation, which grew more and more apparent as sunset approached. This caused me to squirm about, and I saw that Aleem was squirming too, from which I concluded that he, like me, was feeling uncomfortable. If in the short space of only two hours I could feel so suffocated, it was quite apparent that we would be compelled to change position before very long.

It was now beginning to get dark, and we could still make out the remains of the Chenchu, when a barking deer called sharply from the hill-top at the back of us. 'Kharr!' eh cried, 'Kharr! Kharr! Kharr!'

It kept barking hoarsely, but did not move away. Therefore, whatever it had seen was evidently at a safe distance, enabling it to hold its ground while continuing to give the alarm. A peacock honked loudly and left its perch on a tree, also behind us, and flapped heavily away. I caught sight of it out of the corner of my eyes as it sailed with spread wings into the valley beneath the long railway viaduct.

There was silence after that and darkness had almost fallen when a junglehen, also from somewhere on the hill behind us, fluttered from cover with a hysterical 'Kok! Kok! Kok! Kok!' I did not relish all this activity behind me. Without doubt, some animal that represented danger to the creatures that had given their alarms, was afoot somewhere behind us. It could be any tiger or panther, but far more likely it was the man-eater itself.

Within the next few minutes it became too dark to see the Chenchu any more, although I could observe the line of ballast beside

the railway track, stretching away like a faint grey ribbon from the tunnel beneath me. While I was still looking, I heard a small stone roll somewhere behind me. The sound was faint, but my ears, attuned closely to any noise in the jungle, did not fail to register it.

From straining my eyes to see the ballast below, I turned my head to the left to glance uncomfortably backwards. Aleem, next to me was doing the same. Then the thought occurred to me: perhaps the man-eater, in walking along the track, had dislodged one of the small granite stones down there. Maybe the beast had come through the tunnel itself and shifted one of the stones at the entrance. What a lucky thing we had decided not to sit at the mouth of the tunnel!

I was just congratulating myself in this way when a thought struck me with horrifying significance: perhaps the panther was not below us at all. Maybe it had seen us from the hill top above and was crawling down upon us that very moment from behind, waiting to get close enough before launching a final attack.

All further conjecture was interrupted at that moment as the earth beneath me appeared to quake and tremble. As deep rumbling increased to a prolonged roar, and a moment later a shower of sparks and black smoke shot out of the earth before me as a light engine, travelling backwards, rushed out of the tunnel-mouth. Because this engine was moving in reverse, the driver could not use his headlight, and we had no warning of his approach. All other sounds were shut out as the black silhouette of the engine disappeared into the darkness.

That was when the panther decided to attack, and it came from behind us, not from down below. Maybe it could see only one of us and therefore failed to realize that there were actually two people present, for it came bounding along in true man-eater style, but without making a sound, unlike the normal panther that 'woofs' and coughs harshly and loudly when it attacks.

We heard only the muffled fall of its soft pads on the hard ground as it leapt towards us, a faintly-scraping, hollow, bumping sound, which puzzled us. A moment more and it would have been upon us but it then discovered that it was attacking two people where it expected only one. The panther checked itself two yards away, snarling and growling in baffled rage. Then, and only then, did we know that the man-eater had indeed arrived.

I can hardly remember what happened next. I know Aleem sprang up, yelling and I know I rolled violently over and over away from where instinct told me there was danger. But I do remember switching on my light and firing into the face of the panther at point-blank range. It sprang forward then, passing between us and over the edge of the tunnel above which we were seated, to fall with a loud

thud upon the railway track below.

The driver of the midnight down passenger was amazed at the sight revealed by his headlight some time later. Two men were drinking tea. Between them lay a dead panther, and but a short distance away the mangled remains and bones of a man. I wager he will remember the sight long after he retires from service. Being a good fellow, he gave Aleem and me, along with the dead panther, a lift to Diguvametta.

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1 A fried flat cake made from rice flour.

Five

Tales of the Supernatural

Many people have asked me if i have had occult experiences during the years I have spent in the jungles, and for my views on whether such things are true or fictitious, or perhaps the product of an overwrought imagination.

I have really no idea why the occult should be associated with hunting experiences and forest lore, but somehow it is so. Other hunters, far more experienced than I am, have related some interesting happenings of this sort and we have little reason to doubt them. I have had a few curious experiences myself and have told them already, like that of the dead watchman of the Kalhatti forest bungalow. [1] Fortunately I was not alone at that time; my son Donald was with me. We both saw the watchman as clearly as I can see this sheet of paper; yet he had been shot dead and buried long before!

Then there was the case of Captain Neide, who removed an old lamp from an ancient temple. He almost died of fever shortly afterwards and only recovered when he returned the lamp to its resting place. Practically in the same locality lived the girl who was possessed by an evil spirit or spirits, that made her vomit stones each time she attempted to eat her evening meal. I saw this for myself and I saw her cured by a religious healer. Details of both these happenings have been related by me in an earlier book [2]

I am no authority on the occult and I think it is very foolish for anyone to express an opinion on a matter he knows nothing about. So I propose only to record some of the beliefs of the people of South India. Of course, this is no answer to the questions of those who have asked me for a personal opinion. In fact, I have no answer.

Perhaps the most common belief in the south of the peninsula is in a pair of evil spirits that exist as man and wife. The female is referred to in the Tamil language as a *minnispuram* and in Malayalam as a *Yakshi.* It is universally agreed that the female is very hostile and dangerous to human beings, particularly to other women, while the males are generally quite harmless, at least according to Tamil ideas. Such a view corresponds closely to our own as regards the males and females of the human race. But the Malayalees think differently: they say both *Yakshis* (female spirits) and *Gandharwas* (male spirits) are highly dangerous to humans.

The Tamils believe that *minnispurams* (female) can adopt any shape or form, animal or human, and frequently appear as tall pillars

of nebulous whiteness or blackness. Malayalees say that *Yakshis* generally show themselves in a more comely way, as graceful bare-breasted women, clad below the waist in semi-transparent lungis, their hair long and flowing down their backs, thus concealing the hollow backs that are characteristic of these spirits. Tales are rife of how a man or youth, returning home at night, had met one of these nebulous creatures and was tempted to her side; he was then struck across the head or back, began to vomit blood and died within twenty-four hours. Others have been tempted to the edges of wells or tanks and then pushed in.

There is a story of two *Namboodries* (west coast Brahmin priests) who encountered two *Yakshis* in the form of beautiful girls. They spoke to the women and were invited to their home. The priests were tempted, and the house where the two girls lived turned out to be a very nice place indeed. Each of the *Namboodries* went into a room with one of the girls. But for some unaccountable reason one of them became nervous: instead of making love he clutched in his hand his personal talisman, a palm leaf with the sacred word *Nghrie* inscribed on it.

From the next room came the sound of giggling, which stopped suddenly and was followed by the sound of crunching bones. The girl did not touch the priest, but besought him earnestly to throw away the palm leaf and make love, emphasizing the temptation by exposing to him her naked body. But the priest, by now thoroughly suspicious, clung tenaciously to his leaf.

Suddenly the crunching sound in the next room ceased, whereupon the girl grew angry, abused the priest loudly, slapped him across the face and vanished from sight. So did the house! And he found himself alone in the darkness with the mangled body of his friend.

Belief in vampirism, but in a special form, is common. Instead of sucking blood, as do the European counterparts, the Indian vampire, which also appears only at night and sleeps in the earth all day, specializes in dogging the steps of a solitary man at night, stopping when he stops and walking when he walks. This continues to within a hundred yards of the man's destination, and then the vampire strikes! It attacks from behind, then tears its victim to pieces to devour his flesh. The only way of escape is to utter a very sacred word and turn upon the vampire with a drawn knife. The vampire will scream like a stricken animal. It must be stabbed repeatedly till it falls, when it will certainly disappear in a pool of blood. Or so it is said!

Great success in business and much prosperous trading, together with the amassing of several fortunes, can occur when a man agrees to hand over his wife to a spirit of a certain genus who confers great

wealth on the family in exchange for the favour. The earthly husband must live apart from his wife and have no sexual intercourse with her, although he is allowed to speak to her and even feed with her occasionally.

The wife must live in a house apart; at nine each night the doors must be locked and the earthly wife must retire to a windowless bedroom. Soon a nebulous mist appears which takes the form of the spirit-husband. He stays with her till three in the morning, which is when all respectable spirits must depart in wraithform, just as they came, while less respectable men sneak home with their shoes in their hands!

Years ago, I knew a Jewish family that came from Rangoon. The husband dealt in hardware. He had a wife and three children. They were long-married and business was not good. Then a pact was said to have been made with a spirit-husband who came to like the wife, the woman being still of comely appearance despite her three children. It is not clear whether she sought the arrangement or the business-minded husband wanted it.

According to the rules, she shifted to a house apart, closed the doors by nine o'clock and enjoyed her spirit-husband till three in the morning. The earthly husband and the three children slept in another house all night but visited her during the day. Business improved. Everything they touched flourished and turned to gold. The family became one of the most prosperous in Rangoon and fabulously rich.

Then, one afternoon, something happened. The earthly husband and earthly wife were together. The children had gone out. The wife was still a comely woman and old habits were too strong to resist. The couple were intimate.

That night there was a great commotion in the wife's house after nine o'clock. The spirit-husband appeared, and he was highly annoyed; jealous, too. He beat her soundly and said he would never come there again. He did not, and the fortunes of the family went down and down. Business failed completely. They had to sell out, and from being one of the richest, they became one of the poorest families in Rangoon.

There have been cases, too, of spirit-wives who come at night. But whether these bring material riches, or material poverty and trouble, as their earthly counterparts generally do, is not quite clear.

Very frequently I have been asked if there is any truth in black magic, and instances in the lives of close friends of mine are many. I have already related the case of Ossie Brown, to which I was a most reluctant witness. [3]

About twenty years ago I was guilty of having done something that I should have avoided; but it is not clear to me now whether I

offended the party concerned or whether I fell under the person s influence. Call it a subconscious fancy on my part if you like. But for more than a fortnight, at exactly 3 a.m., I would wake up with a frightening, choking sensation, as if something or someone were grasping me by the throat. Then I would hear heavy footsteps outside the window—the measured, slow tread of someone walking in army boots. I dashed out on more than one occasion with a stick—even with a gun! Yet in the bright moonlight nothing could be seen, while the footsteps ceased. No sooner did I return inside than the footsteps started once again. They would last for about ten minutes.

Things came to a head one night. I got up almost suffocated. I heard the footsteps. I dashed out with the gun as usual and searched everywhere. There was nothing to be seen. I came back and the footsteps started again. I closed and locked the window. It was all very strange, but I determined to ignore it. Switching off the electric light, I got into bed.

The next moment something soft struck against my mosquito curtain and fell to the floor. Leaping out of bed, I turned on the light. There on the ground, was a ball of wet mud as large as my fist. Where had it come from? The window was closed. My wife and children were in the next room, sound asleep.

At this stage I determined to do something about the matter—something I would normally never think of doing.

There is a seer living in Bangalore who has achieved considerable fame as a fortune-teller, a recoverer of stolen property and necromancer. His fee for consultation is one rupee (about one shilling and four-pence), to be presented to him on a betel leaf—nothing more; nothing less. I had heard a good deal about this man, and had thought him a clever rogue.

I went to see him. He had very large black eyes and a big moustache. Other than this, there was nothing outstanding about him. I came into his room and laid down my rupee on a betel leaf, feeling myself to be the biggest fool in town at that moment.

Looking at me, he calmly said: 'You are being troubled by hearing footsteps at night. Lately, a mud ball was thrown at you. You have been bewitched by'—(and here he described person concerned) 'because you refused to give the individual what was asked.'

That's easy to explain, you will say. Thought-reading is the answer; or some form of hypnotism; or both. You may be quite right. But listen to what happened next.

'Go home,' he told me. 'Measure six paces from your window in the direction in which the sun rises. Then dig a foot into the ground. You will find something. Destroy it. You will not be troubled again.'

I went home, feeling angry. I took a shovel in my hands, feeling

more angry. I measured six paces from my window towards the east, and began to dig. Not only was I angry now, but also wondered how I had become such a fool. But I found something, and I had dug just about a foot deep. I found a doll made of clay buried in the earth. A crude affair with misshapen head and arms and legs. But human hair had been stuck to the head and a nail driven through it. At the pointed end of the nail was a dried lemon skin that had been sliced almost in half. The human hair looked remarkably like my own.

I was amazed; and I burned the damned thing! I did not hear the footsteps at three next morning, or ever again!

Now, how had the seer known? It could not have been thought-reading, because I did not know about the doll myself. And he could not have prepared the stage beforehand, for how did he know I would consult him?

Years later, I related the incident to a person who dabbled in such matters. He told me the clay doll with human hair was made to represent me. The nail driven through the head signified that the mantra had been made against my mind, my powers of reason. If the curse had not been removed by the seer telling me where to find the doll, I would assuredly have become insane within a short time!

This occurrence interested me so much that I made up my mind to investigate these matters more fully. As this friend was known to be a black magician, a necromancer, I began worrying him to tell me more; in fact, to initiate me into his brotherhood. But he flatly refused!

I have a trait about which some people who do not like me complain bitterly. It is stubbornness, coupled with persistence. The more my friend refused, the more I pestered him. So, at length, he initiated me as a member of the brotherhood of the Silver Armlet!

I have my silver armlet which I wear on certain occasions, and nobody else is allowed to touch it. Nor can I tell you all the mystic rites of the society as I am under oath not to reveal them; but I can give you the outline of the initiation ceremonies.

The first entails a visit to any old cemetery—the older it is the better—on the night of the *amavasa* , which is the night before the new moon. The neophyte must go alone, after midnight, carrying either a live black cock and a knife with which to cut its throat, or if he feels squeamish about cutting the creature's throat, a couple of pounds of pig's entrails and liver instead.

He must enter the cemetery, and after a brief *pooja* by lighting camphor, etc., he should cut the cock's throat and then proceed to cut up the whole bird, feather and all, into finger-long pieces. Or, if he has brought pig's liver and entrails instead, cut that up into pieces. Next he must walk through the cemetery without looking back, throwing

these pieces over his left and right shoulders one by one while using the most foul language he can think of, in whichever dialect he wishes. 'Take this, you—and eat it,' and so forth. This attracts the spirit or the disembodied entity, to him.

The neophyte then goes home and performs another ceremony which makes this spirit a servant to him.

You may have heard and read of miracles performed by holy men in India who can produce from the air articles like fruit of any kind, money, sweetmeats and even certain medicines. These things are made possible by the services of a species of small genii known as *kutty shaitan,* one of which becomes attached to the individual on a sort of fifty-fifty contract basis. They each become a servant of the other and are bound together for life. The word *kutty* in Tamil and Malayalam signifies 'small;' while the word *shaitan* in Urdu and Hindi means 'devil'—a curious combination of four languages. This spirit belongs to the category of 'elementals,' but assumes the form of a miniature negro, not more than three to four inches tall, in order to make itself visible.

After midnight on any night, but particularly on *amavasa* night, when it becomes perceptible, a curious movement can be seen by a watcher concealed in a pen with a herd of buffaloes. He notices something flicking from the back of one animal to another. It looks like a large moth, or maybe a small bat, but apparently has no wings! It dances on one back, leaps to another, sways, disappears and reappears on the back of another buffalo. But the animals do not appear to see it, or notice or feel its presence.

This is a *kutty shaitan* in its natural habitat and condition. If the watcher sees this much and is satisfied, all is still well. But if he wants to become like the other great men who can pick up anything they want 'out of the air,' so to speak, he is playing with fire! For to do this, he has to get the *kutty shaitan* into himself. He has to make a 'deal,' a bargain, with the elemental spirit: a promise that they will serve each other for life. To make the deal is simple; but to get out of it is practically impossible.

What he has to do, to make the deal, is to approach the buffaloes and go through the motions of trying to snatch and capture the little sprite—although of course he can never do this in fact—while in his mind he concentrates on the thought that he desires the services of the *kutty shaitan.* He will receive a message, sometimes at the first attempt and sometimes after two or three failures—which is generally a telepathic message to his subconscious and thence to his conscious mind—as to what to do next. Generally the message instructs him to carve, (or even purchase) a small black doll, of wood, ivory, bone or any substance, which he must keep on a table or shelf in his house,

and perform a daily *pooja* to it with lighted candles, incense, camphor and other things. This little image represents the *kutty shaitan,* and this ceremony seals the bond whereby the sprite agrees to serve him.

The man can then ask for and get anything he wants, *provided he agrees to return it within a fixed time,* say a month or two. *But he cannot get something for nothing.* The little sprite will bring him money, an apple, balm for a headache, a cooked meal, even petrol for a stalled car. *But everything has to be returned at the time promised.* Otherwise, the individual, whoever he may be, has had it!

The sprite does only one free service for its patron. It warns him of approaching danger and contrives to get him out of it. But the wages demanded by this sprite are costly. The life-span of its patron is shortened; he can have no dealings with a woman; he is hardly allowed to sleep at night; he can never accumulate wealth, although he is permitted enough for his actual needs; he will not be on good terms with his family; he will always be a wanderer, restless, unable ever to settle down.

As a member of the brotherhood of the Silver Armlet, I can assure you that black magic is a fascinating subject to study—but a hard and ruthless taskmaster if embraced!

I have another good friend, a retired army doctor who was a colonel in the India Medical Service during World War II. He told me a story which he assures me is perfectly true. While stationed at Madras, he happened to meet two brothers, Mohammed Bey and Ali Bey, who were Egyptians. He became friendly with the former, but did not know for a long time that both brothers were necromancers who had been trained in Egypt under an adept.

When he learned this, the colonel jokingly told his friend. 'Oh, then you will be able to show me a spirit. I am longing to see one and have been trying for years, without success.'

'Not only will I show you a spirit,' replied Mohammed Bey gravely, 'but I will make him your servant for your lifetime, to help you in anything you want and to bring good fortune to you. But there is one firm condition. Never, at any time, must your employ this spirit servant to do harm to another, or for any sort of evil purpose whatever. If you do, he will turn upon you and you will surely die, and most painfully too. Do you agree?'

'You have my word,' the doctor said with a laugh. 'The proposition is very attractive and I'm extremely interested.'

Mohammed Bey then asked for a writingpad and a pencil, and when he had been given these materials was busy for a while. The colonel has very kindly lent me the sheet of paper on which the Egyptian made his drawing more than twenty years ago, and I have faithfully copied it and reproduced it on pages 129 and 130.

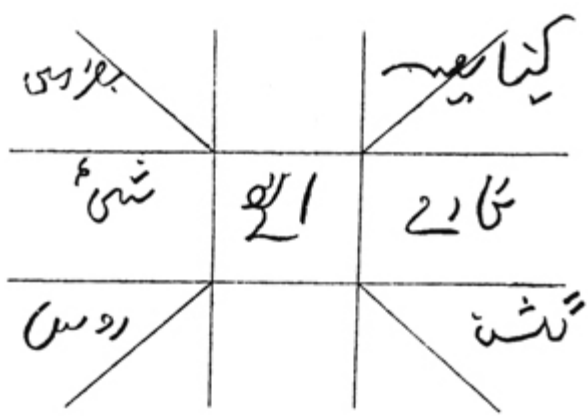
The mantra, or words for summoning spirits,
as told by the Egyptian necromancer

Ah, Ah, Sharheel wa burrhoode wa noodaju wa askeerah if alue aywhel kadhamu ma amuro bi hi mitt shain hathal kagadi bi hyqi sharheel us Fur Ya rooh (three times) *Tha-al* (three times) *bill amruho* (seven times).

Begin by facing the north. Then turn to the right or east, and read the above words seven times. Then turn back again to the north. Then turn to the left or west side and read the words seven times. Then turn back to the north. Next turn right around to face in the opposite or southern direction, and read the words seven times. Then turn back again to the north, where the words should be read once more seven times. After having finished the four points of the compass, turn in the direction of the cemetery you have selected for your visit and read the words twenty-one times. Lastly, breathe in slowly, hold your breath a little and then exhale slowly three times, each time concentrating upon a good manifestation of the spirit desired by the person teaching this, or that you would like to see yourself.

This procedure is to be followed for twenty-two days, beginning in such a fashion that the twenty-third day falls on a Tuesday or a Friday. That twenty-third day is the day on which to go to the cemetery. In other words, carry out the directions for twenty-two days, ending on a Monday or a Thursday. The next day (Tuesday or Friday) is the day on which to visit the cemetery.

The following drawing may be traced on a piece of paper, folded and kept in a locket or wallet for good luck:



'I have written in Roman-Arabic so that you may be able to read

it,' Mohammed Bey explained (Roman-Arabic is Arabic written phonetically in Roman characters). 'Next come the instructions in English. Carry these out faithfully and to the letter.'

'Order a large garland of roses to be prepared by the evening of the final day, and ninety minutes before midnight that day have a bath and dress in a clean white shirt and suit. I will call for you at 11.30 and show you what to do next. One more thing. You must fast on that last day, but you may drink a cup of milk in the morning and another in the evening. Nothing more.'

'Now let us start calculating which is the twenty-third day.'

Thereupon the Egyptian turned to a large calendar hanging on the wall, made some calculations while counting the days on the calendar with the tip of a pencil, and finally named a day and a date.

'Be ready,' he added cryptically, and the doctor agreed.

The instructions were carried out to the letter, but during the interval the colonel never met Mohammed Bey. At the end of the third week he had the feeling that his friend was deliberately avoiding him. He wondered if it was all a joke.

The final day came. The garland of roses which the colonel had ordered was ready by evening. At 10.30 p.m. he had a bath and then dressed in clean white clothes. He tells me he felt himself a fool.

At exactly 11.30 p.m., a car drew up beneath the portico of his old-fashioned residence and the Egyptian alighted. He, too, was dressed in white clothes.

'Bring the garland, doctor,' he said in a matter-of-fact voice, 'we must be there by midnight.'

Wondering where they were going, the doctor did as he was told. They reached the cemetery in fifteen minutes and, carrying the garland of roses, the doctor followed his companion through the wicket-gate. It was pitch-dark, except for a faint glow cast by the stars. Indside the cemetery the Egyptian stopped for a moment. Then he moved among the graves for some distance, as if in search of a particular one, while the doctor followed him. They found it at last. A grave with a granite slab and a rounded headstone. It was too dark to see more.

'Place the garland around the headstone, doctor,' Mohammed Bey directed, 'and stand at the foot of the grave with your arms folded across your chest. I will stand at the side. Now, whatever happens, do not be afraid. I am here; have confidence in me. We must wait for midnight.'

A few minutes later a distant clock chimed and then struck the hour of twelve. But Mohammed Bey did nothing for a few minutes more. Then he started intoning something in a language the doctor could not understand, but thought to be Arabic. The words came in a

singsong voice and the Egyptian appeared to be in a trance.

This continued for a while, and then something seemed to go wrong with the proceedings. The chanting came to an end abruptly, and was followed by angry words from the Egyptian, with an interval, and then more angry words followed. It seemed as if he was having a heated argument with some invisible person, whose voice could not be heard.

The Egyptian grew more excited. He waved his arms. He appeared to be using abusive language. Then he spat upon the grave. The next instant he fell as if pole-axed across the granite slab. His body twitched in the faint gloom, while horrible, gurgling sounds came from his throat. The doctor panicked and was on the verge of bolting, his only thought being to save himself by running for dear life.

At that moment his professional training came to his aid. He was a doctor after all. The Egyptian might be having an epileptic fit, a heart attack or a seizure of some kind. It was his medical duty to stay. Also came the paralysing thought that the Egyptain might die if left alone. When his body was found, if it was ever discovered that the doctor had been with him in the cemetery, he might be accused of murder.

So he ran forward, grasped the body of his companion that was still thrashing about and from which came dreadful gasps and groans, and attempted to raise him.

The doctor swears he encountered a force stronger than his own that was keeping the man down. A struggle followed, then the Egyptian gasped: 'Roses—the garland— give it to me.'

The doctor let go of his companion, removed the garland from the tombstone, and threw it to the prostrate man. While he still grovelled on the granite slab as if in an epileptic fit, Mohammed Bey tore the garland to shreds. And as the garland

disintegrated, the black magician appeared to be gaining mastery over the situation.

Eventually he stood up, dishevelled and breathing hard. Blood trickled down his face from a gash across his forehead, where he had struck it against the granite slab.

'It's all right now, doctor,' he gasped, 'but let's get out of here. I'll tell you in the car.'

The two men hurried out to the car and began to drive back to the doctor's house. The colonel waited till his companion regained his composure. At last the Egyptian spoke.

'The spirit came all right. In fact, there were several. But they were in grotesque forms, resembling strange animals. They all volunteered to serve you. But I insisted there should be only one, and

that one should adopt a human form. They refused, and were adamant that all should attach themselves to you and in their present strange forms. I would not allow it. There was an argument and suddenly the leader struck me down and they all set upon me, choking me. If you had not thrown me the garland to break the spell, I would have been killed.'

A clever piece of acting by the Egyptian, put on to deceive the doctor, you will say. The cut across his forehead against the tombstone was, of course, an unforeseen accident. Perhaps it was not blood after all, but something surreptitiously applied!

Quite possible I do agree, and a reasonable explanation. But remember, the Egyptian never asked his friend for money, or a favour at any time. Then why did he go through all this trouble?

Many Indian families, particularly on the west coast of India, believe they are guarded by what they call 'deities.' These are not evil spirits or jinns or even gods. They are thought to be superior spiritual beings. Each is distinguished

from the other by the scent of a particular fragrant flower which comes from nowhere. Some bring with them the scent of jasmine; this is very common and I have smelt it myself many times in rooms and in places where flowers of any kind certainly did not exist. Superior orders are said to bring the scent of roses, or other fragrances.

Amavasa night—the night before the new moon, the darkest night of the month—is the time generally chosen for practising all kinds of black magic, and it is on such nights that many Indian families feel and hear the presence of their guardian spirits. These evidence themselves by the sound of a heavy chain being dragged or jingled, or in the case of a female spirit, by the subtle clicking of bracelets against each other. The major guardian announces his presence by making a noise as if a man were walking around the house snapping his thumb against his fingers every once in a while, or by measured, heavy footsteps.

Belief in the existence of spirits and in the occult has found its way into all religions in India. In my own opinion, all creeds, as originally preached and believed, were of pure and divine origin: Hinduism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism and Christianity all pointed the way to the Supreme Being. But priestcraft on the one hand, and superstition and occultism on the other, have become so intermingled with these doctrines that many of their followers practise a religion very different, and in certain cases quite opposed, to the doctrines of the original parent order.

The beliefs and practices of many Christian converts in India, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, are indeed a queer mixture of religion, superstition and occultism. Very properly, these people are

the despair of most right-thinking priests of all faiths, although unfortunately here and there are some who encourage distorted beliefs to the point of malpractice in order to drive home that fear of hellfire by which they hold their congregations in submission.

Saint Anthony, who is regarded everywhere as a most beneficent man while alive, has come to be looked upon by many in India as an infallible means of effecting revenge upon others as well as acquiring benefits by prayer. Horrible acts of revenge and the defeat of enemies by fair means or foul, including painful illness and lingering death, are sought through him. Saint Anthony is also regarded as the main means for the recovery of lost or stolen property and for inflicting punishment, by many kinds of violence, upon the thief responsible. Some of the forms of punishment which Saint Anthony is asked to inflict upon the culprit or the enemy are of a revolting character and out of all proportion to the crimes committed. For example, in retribution for stealing a pound of rice, Saint Anthony is asked to inflict upon the thief, known or unknown, such appalling diseases as cholera and plague.

My servant is a Roman Catholic convert, but here is her procedure for recovering lost property through Saint Anthony. To find the thief, the supplicant must first take a bath. Then he must wash the statue of the saint, or (if he does not possess a statue) the glass covering the saint's photograph. To bathe the saint's likeness in milk, rather than in water, is considered more efficacious. The ceremony should be performed at sunset on a Tuesday. After this, four candles are lighted at the foot of the statue or photograph, before which an offering of flowers is made and incense burned. A small coin is tied in a cloth to the top of the frame of the photograph or placed at the foot of the statue.

A prayer is then offered to the saint to grant the favour of finding the thief, restoring the money or property, or severely punishing the offender, as the case may be. This is accompanied by a vow that, if the petition be granted, charity in some form or another will be given to thirteen beggars in the name of the saint. This charity may be in the shape of a small gift of money, or a garment, or a meal. Such prayers to the saint are offered every evening at sundown for thirteen days. It is thought certain favours of a minor kind will be granted within eight days, whereas major favours, in respect of articles of greater value, may take longer, but action by the saint will surely be evident within a month.

The recovery of lost property purchased by hard-earned money, or of stolen money, is assured by the lighting of a single candle, accompanied by incense, for thirteen consecutive evenings before the statue or picture of Saint Anthony.

In some parts of India, particularly old Hyderabad state, these supplications to Saint Anthony assume a more forceful character. The feet of the saint's statue are bound with cord, signifying that the supplicant is not prepared to release him until or unless the favour is granted. The most drastic—and amusing—instance that I have met is the procedure followed by an old Anglo-Indian living at a place called Kazipet. He was an old army man and possibly thought Saint Anthony needed a spot of disciplining now and again. For should the favour not be granted within the stipulated time, the statue of the saint was subjected to rough treatment. It was tied to a tamarind tree out in the garden and smeared with a mixture of chili-powder and other ingredients that are known to be extremely pungent. The idea was by torture to force the poor saint into granting the favour, and once that happened the old soldier brought the statue indoors again, washed it, bathed it in milk and restored it to its pedestal.

Statues and photographs of the Virgin Mary were similarly appealed to for general favours. Thursday was considered the right day for the first supplication, to be repeated for eight days in succession.

The old English method of tying up a pair of scissors, so that the two loops of the scissors rest on the fingertips of two persons and rotate at the mention of the name of the guilty party, is very widely practised in India. So is the custom of suspending a rosary over a pot of incense, so that the cross is immediately above the fire; it is then said to oscillate at the name of the guilty party.

In cemeteries in which Indian Christians are buried, it is common to see the relatives of the dead come to the grave on certain days with offerings of milk and food, presumably to sustain the departed spirit on its long journey to higher realms.

My purpose in mentioning these things is to emphasize the extent to which superstition and ancient customs have become inextricably involved with Christianity in India. Superstition and belief and fear of the unknown are rife in all walks of life in all communities and all religions. Among the upper-class Hindus it takes a higher form but is nevertheless powerful. From birth, a child's horoscope is all-important and plays a primary part in the arrangement of a marriage—the boy and girl rarely see each other before the ceremony—and the stars continue to have a major role throughout the man's life. Conspicuously marked on calendars, for every day of the month, are two lists of timings, headed respectively *rahukalam* and *guligaikalam,* meaning 'bad time' and 'good time', and no Hindu, and many who are not Hindus, will dream of leaving home at a time, or embarking on a business venture or journey at an hour which falls within the *rahukalam* or 'bad time' period. He will patiently wait till that time

had passed and the *guligaikalam* or 'good time' has come. Then he will set out on his venture, very confident and assured of success. A ring that has very magical properties in attracting the fair sex, sometimes to their great embarrassment, can be made in the following way. I took great pains to write down the formula, or whatever you care to call it. The only snag is that the mantras involved have to be acquired and learned. The secret is so valuable, presumably because the reward is so great, that so far nobody seems willing to tell me these mantras, so that I may learn and repeat them. But I am still trying to find somebody who will part with the secret.

However, you must procure a live fresh-water turtle of the dark variety of medium size. This is not very difficult. For about a rupee someone will bring one to you. They abound in fresh-water wells throughout the countryside.

Having procured the live turtle, get some dried pumpkin seeds that will germinate easily. These may be obtained readily from any seedsmen, or from any pumpkin purchased in the market, though in the latter event they should be well dried.

Next, tempt the unfortunate turtle with some food such as earthworms or a small frog. When he sticks his neck out of his shell to eat, decapitate him with a deft stroke of a sharp knife, delivering the blow just behind the back of his head and high up the neck; that is, be sure to leave a good bit of stump protruding. After all movement has ceased insert about half a dozen of the dried pumpkin seeds well into the raw stump of the neck. Then bury the turtle in an upright position in the ground, so that the neck-stump, with the seeds in it, is rather less than a couple of inches below the surface of the ground. Then water the spot sparingly every day.

The pumpkin seeds, or some of them, will sprout. Select the best and healthiest. Wait till the second shoot appears, and then carefully pluck the whole seedling, along with its roots, from the decaying neck-stump of the turtle. Clean away the mess from the roots, and cram the seedling tightly, roots and all, through the groove on the underside into the hollow of a ring, which you should have prepared in advance.

Any ring will do, but one of silver or copper is best. A hollow groove, as deep as possible, should have been cut around the ring.

After you have pushed as much as is possible of the seedling with its roots into this hollow groove, seal up the same with sealing-wax or any form of lacquer or gummy substance that will dry and harden. The ring should not be sent to a jeweller for sealing, as the heat he will apply to melt the metal to seal the ring will burn up the seedling inside.

The ring, having thus been made ready and sealed, must not be

used till the next new-moon day. At midnight on the night before, that is that night of *amavasa,* a mantra has to be repeated over the ring eleven times, and it is then ready for use. Its efficacy in attracting and embarrassing females is said to last for a lifetime.

This topic will not be complete unless I tell you of an adventure that befell me near a town called Chitaldroog, in a jungle once renowned for tigers, situated to the east of the district of Shimoga in Mysore state. The village of Sampigehalli, a few miles from Chitaldroog, is surrounded by thick forest. About four miles from this village, along a track leading to another village named Budhalli, in the midst of the jungle, stands a ruined temple with a very deep well. The temple and the well are reputed to be haunted, for which reason hardly a soul will approach within a furlong of them in broad daylight, while the area is of course absolutely taboo after sunset.

Because of its isolation, a sloth bear or two invariably lived in or close to the ruins, while quite frequently a panther could shelter in the old temple close to the bears, but without having anything to do with them. Now and again a tiger decided to take up residence there for a few weeks, and when that happened the bears and the panther temporarily took themselves off to safer abodes. For either of them to dare to share the same abode with the king of the jungle might prove a costly experiment. But eventually the tiger would move on, and then the bears and the panther would come back and things return to normal.

Some time ago a villager disappeared from Sampigehalli, and a month later another disappeared from Budhalli. Nobody knew what happened to them, nor was there any sign of the remains. As villagers in India rarely leave their birthplaces voluntarily, the disappearance of these men, one after the other, left food for thought. It suggested that a tragedy of some sort had taken place.

About this time an unusually large tiger, said by the villagers to be exceptionally fierce because of the manner in which it boldly attacked their herds of cattle and never failed to make a kill, took up its abode in the locality, or even in the old temple itself. This was established by its pug-marks, to be seen early in the morning returning to the temple, superimposed upon the pug-marks it had left in the dust of the trail when it had gone forth the previous evening. The villagers felt that this tiger had devoured their two companions, one after the other, so they appealed to the authorities for help against the man-eater that they were convinced dwelt in the ruins of the old temple.

Sampigehalli was at one time a favourite haunt of mine and several of my village friends wrote to me to come to their aid. When I reached the village a fortnight later I made painstaking inquiries

regarding the last movements of the two missing men, but everything seemed to be shrouded in mystery. A village girl was mixed up in the affair and it was said that both the men were her suitors. The girl was poor, whereas both the men were comparatively well-to-do, owning land in their own villages. They were married and had families, but no member of either family had the least knowledge of the large sum of money each of these individuals was reported to be carrying on his person just prior to his disappearance, nor did they know why their relative had been carrying the money about with him. All this came to light only afterwards. For India is one of the few places left in the world today where wives do not dare to question their husbands' movements or authority.

The man's word is law and women are content to confine their activities to the kitchen.

Meanwhile, there was no evidence whatever to connect the tiger with the disappearance of the two men. Casually, in the course of inquiries, I spoke about the missing men to the girl concerned and came away feeling that she knew much more about the matter than she would say. To my mind, she was much more dangerous than any man-eating tiger and far more astute; but not being a policeman, I did not feel obliged to act as an informer or a detective. I was much more interested in the tiger than in the girl's motives and movements and what had happened to her suitors.

I therefore decided to go to the old temple immediately after lunch that day, select a suitable hiding place and remain there all night in the hope of seeing the suspected man-eater. I had not made up my mind whether to shoot the creature if I did happen to see it, for something told me that it was not the culprit. In any case it was summer time, far better known in India as the 'hot weather,' and it was only a day or two until the full moon. The moonlight and the open air would be much more pleasant than spending the night in some little mudhouse, where the heat would be intense, or even in the forest department's bungalow.

After a good lunch I got together the few things I would require for the night: my rifle, ammunition, flask of tea, water-bottle, electric torch and some biscuits in a cloth bag, that would not crackle as a paper wrapper would, and set out for the old temple. In a little over an hour I reached my destination. I knew the place well enough, although I had never spent a night there. It consisted of a small central structure built of solid, irregular blocks of granite, surrounded by what had once been a fairly high stone wall. The well, which was indeed very deep, still held water and was in the courtyard to the front of the temple.

I do not know how much water was in the well, but the surface

glinted down below, far beneath the level of the ground. The well itself was not more than fifteen feet in diameter, ringed at the top by a low stone parapet about a yard high. Many of the granite blocks forming the main temple, the four walls of the courtyard and the parapet of the well, had become loose and had fallen away from their original positions, while gnarled or dwarfed trees, principally the jungle fig, had been able to take root wherever the lantana shrub had not already taken possession. The scene in general was bleak and dreary, and it was clear that with time the few remaining traces of the temple and its environs would be swallowed up by the advancing jungle.

But at the moment I was not interested in the temple as a structure, historical or otherwise. What I was interested in was the hiding place of the tiger, and that did not take me long to find. The only possible place was the main temple building itself. The earth was mostly hard, but here and there were sandy patches and clearly imprinted in the soft ground, both coming and going, were the pug-marks of a large tiger, leading to and from the old ruins.

I knew that if the animal were at home at that moment it would probably be sound asleep inside. I had never been inside this structure myself, but felt safe in conjecturing that it followed the general pattern of such buildings, with a sanctuary in the form of a small separate room at the farther end of what would be the one and only prayer-room of the temple proper. This small inner room would house a Nandi or two, stone images of varying sizes of the sacred bull that is universally respected by the Hindus in India, or perhaps an image or several images of one of the many gods and goddesses.

To approach this opening would, in the circumstances, be to invite disaster. If the tiger were at home, man-eater or not, it would definitely resent such blatant violation of its privacy and would probably decide to get rid of the invader with the utmost dispatch. It was one of those occasions when brain rather than brawn was indicated, so I stood still to take stock of the situation and decide upon a plan.

And the solution lay right there before me in the broken parapet of the old well. All I had to do was to sit comfortably behind it, facing the opening leading to the main temple. If the tiger were inside, as I felt sure it was, then sooner or later it would have to come out, and this it could only do by using the entrance. I would have this entrance covered in the sights of my rifle, so that it did not matter at what angle the tiger decided to emerge. The whole thing seemed 'a piece of cake.'

The sun blazed down upon me when I took up my position behind the parapet, directly facing the temple entrance. I realized my

head was above the top of the parapet, so I picked up some of the fallen stone blocks and arranged them before me, leaving a space about six inches square through which to peer. If the tiger showed up, and if I had decided to shoot him by then, I could fire through this loophole.

The only other requirement was that I should sit absolutely still. Fortunately I am well practised in that sort of thing, so that neither the heat nor the winged insects that came as if from nowhere, not even the occasional slate-black lizard with its brilliant orange and yellow back worried me when the sweat trickled down my face and the insects settled on my lips and lizards crawled over my body.

Then came the evening. The calls of roosting birds preceded the squeaking of early bats and the buzz of a passing mosquito. It was almost dark when the moon, that was not yet at the full, began to rise. Soon its glow outlined the dark shadow that was the entrance to the temple through which the tiger might, at any moment now, if he was at home, be expected to emerge. What was left of daylight faded rapidly, but moonlight took its place, so that even before I appreciated the passage of time, it was night. I shivered a little, for in those few minutes it had become distinctly chill.

That was when I heard the sound for the first time. Three distinct, sharp whistles that seemed to come from the well right in front of me. The first whistle was low, the second higher, the third shorter, sharper, louder and pitched yet higher than its two predecessors.

Who the hell could be hiding in the old well? To say the least, I was very annoyed. After all the time I had spent sitting motionless in the sweltering heat of the sun, must this so-and-so start whistling at this critical moment and frighten away the tiger that might be expected to emerge from the temple? Was it worth hiding any longer? The tiger would have heard that whistling even more clearly than I had done, and it would never show up with a human being just outside its shelter. Or would it? If it really was a man-eater it might think some victim was within striking distance.

Quite ten to fifteen minutes must have elapsed when I heard the whistling again, loud and clear, in three sharp blasts. The first low and rather long-drawn; the second louder, shorter and higher pitched; the third loudest, shortest and on a yet higher note. Then there was complete silence.

I was in the act of getting up to peer down the well and curse the intruder when a slight movement in the oblong blackness of the temple entrance caught my eye. A greyish blur seemed to pass against that blackness. It vanished, came again, and disappeared once more. A moment later, clearly outlined, sideways on the moonlight, stood the

tiger!

It was obvious that it never suspected my presence for a moment, as it never even glanced in my direction. It was looking directly ahead when I first saw it, but stopped at that moment to bend its neck and lick its right foreleg. I could clearly see the movement of its head, and hear the rasping of its rough tongue over its coat each time that it licked itself. And then, for the third time, came those three loud whistles in rising crescendo.

That has done it, I thought. The tiger must surely hear them now. It would crouch, growl, spring back into the shelter of the temple, or rush away, according to its disposition or the state of its nerves. But nothing happened! The tiger continued to lick itself, unperturbed. Evidently it had not heard the whistling, and for this there could be only two explanations. Either the tiger was stone deaf, or the whistling did not register upon its hearing.

The tiger stopped licking itself and began to move forward. At the same time I heard what appeared to be the flapping of wings from the depths of the well before me. The sound was heavy, slow and distinct. It must have been made by some large and heavy bird, I decided, or a bat not much smaller than the familiar Indian flying-fox or fruit-bat.

Then for the fourth time that evening came the whistle, louder and closer than ever before. My decision whether or not to shoot the tiger was quite forgotten in this mystery. Indeed, I did not even watch it, but stared at the top of the old well, waiting for I know not what to come out.

The heavy, slow flapping was continuous now. The large bird or bat, or whatever it was, drew nearer every instant to the top and would show itself in a moment or two. A strange fascination came over me as I stared at the opening. Once again came the three whistles, and then what seemed a large, dark shadow of indefinite shape issued from the well.

The moonlight was bright and clear and I was staring at the spot. There was no mistaking that I saw something, but it had no real form or shape: a small cloud of what seemed to be dark smoke came out of the well. It might have been six feet in diameter by about the same height.

A great lassitude seemed to come over me; a sort of strange, morbid despair. Did it matter what came out of the well? Was life worth living with all its troubles? Why not jump into the well and forget about everything?

I shook myself and stared, and as I watched the cloud hovered for a moment above the mouth of the well and in the next second was gone. The moonlight shone clearly through the spot which, a moment

before, had been clouded by the indefinable shape. I had started perspiring with excitement when the tiger made its appearance, which is something I still do to this day when I see a tiger in the wild. Now I felt cold and clammy.

Meanwhile the tiger, which at least was of flesh and bone, wandered away. I knew that in all likelihood it would not return till the early hours of the morning, unless it found something to kill and eat sooner. I would therefore, in all probability, have to wait for a long time if I still wanted to shoot it when it came back. But somehow I did not want to shoot this tiger; the strange whistling, and the still stranger shadow that had emerged from the well, interested me much more. In any case, it was far better to sit there in the moonlight and the open air, than to be in the stuffy shelter I was occupying four miles away at Sampigehalli.

I forgot everything but the whistling and the shadow, and fell to conjecturing what on earth could have been the cause of what I had seen. The whistling had not resembled the call of any bird with which I was familiar. Rather, it was distinctly human in timbre. The flapping of wings I had heard could have been caused by some large bird, or the Indian flying-fox that I have already mentioned. But neither bird nor bat had emerged from the well, and I had never for a moment removed my gaze from its mouth. What had come out had been something far different and quite unexpected: a smokey shape of indefinable nature. In plain words, a small cloud. And that cloud had vanished before my eyes!

So absorbed was I in the problem that I lost all count of time and became oblivious to my surroundings till a low growl, somewhere behind me, brought me back to earth with a jolt. The tiger was standing there! It had returned from another direction and had discovered my presence. It was reputed to be a man-eater that had killed and devoured two men already.

I swung around in alarm, instinctively raising the .405 to my shoulder. About forty yards away this tiger sat on his haunches in the moonlight, staring hard at me. Then it inclined its head slightly and snarled in mild protest. As clearly as if it had spoken the words, this animal was saying, 'Can't you get the hell out of here?' That satisfied me entirely. It had had me at its mercy and could have killed me before I was even aware of its presence. This tiger was no man-eater!

I try to be grateful when a good turn is done to me and I was definitely grateful to this animal. It had spared my life and I would return the courtesy. I got to my feet, whereupon the tiger disappeared from sight.

Keeping the rifle in the crook of my arm to guard against a sudden change of mind on the beast's part, I shone the beam of my

torch down the well, expecting to discover the mysterious whistler who must be hiding there. But only the water, deep down, reflected the light. There was certainly nobody in hiding, for I searched every inch of the interior. Then I turned and started to walk away from the place, thinking furiously. The tiger was nowhere to be seen.

I decided to spend the rest of that night on the veranda of the forest rest house, so I walked to the little bungalow that stood about a mile from the village and called aloud to the watchman who should have been sleeping inside. Nobody answered, although I called again and again and again. Obviously, the watchman was not on watch, but snugly asleep in some hut in the village.

This was no surprise. Those who have lived in India will know that invariably watchmen do not watch. They sleep soundly instead; perhaps even more soundly than you or I, for their minds are quite clear that night is the time when people must sleep.

So I climbed the stone leading up to the veranda which stretched around three sides of the little rectangular bungalow. The caretaker had been careless enough to leave an armchair out on one of these extensions, knowing well enough that nobody would steal such a rickety article, even if there had been a thief in so desolate a place; so into the armchair I sank to snatch a few hours' sleep.

My intention was to tell my friends as Sampigehalli the next morning that I was convinced the tiger was no man-eater, and that if they really wanted to solve the mystery of the missing men, they should suggest to the police that they question the lissom lass who was so intimately connected with both of them; particularly as to what had become of their money. Then I would head for home in the Studebaker.

But sleep eluded me for the rest of that night. Those mysterious whistles, the sound of flapping wings, the peculiar lethargy that had come over me, and above all that strange cloudy shape that had come out of the well, demanded a sane explanation. Wrestling with the problem, tired, nature finally asserted herself and I fell asleep after dawn had broken. It was late when I awoke that morning, but the caretaker of the bungalow had not yet returned.

I went to the village, where I told my friends that I had seen the tiger and that it had seen me. I explained it was no man-eater. I did not tell them about the whistling sounds I had heard nor the cloudy form I had seen, for there appeared to be no point in complicating my story unnecessarily and making myself ridiculous.

Then one of my friends inquired where I had concealed myself, and I told him that I had hidden behind the parapet of the old well. At the mention of that word, he looked at me strangely.

'Did you see anything other than the tiger?' he inquired. 'Did you

hear anything?'

I did not answer for a while. Then I countered. 'Why do you ask?'

'Did you see, or hear, a huge bat? The sound of beating wings?'

The sound of beating wings! Most certainly I had heard that sound: the sound of heavy, flapping wings issuing from the depths of the well. In fact I had heard that sound several times, each time coming higher and closer to the mouth of the well, and it had ceased only after that strange smoky shape had emerged. What a fool I had been not to shine the light of my torch down the well the first time I had heard it! I might have been able to see something. Then I remembered I had been waiting for the tiger and so had not wanted to show myself.

My friend had noticed the delay in my reply. His face took on a knowing smile. So I told him everything.

He appeared horrified when I mentioned the hazy form that had emerged from the well. Evidently others had heard the whistling and the sound of flapping wings, but nobody seemed to have seen anything, because no one had waited to see.

Then my friend came up with a strange tale. According to him, a couple of hundred or more years ago—he did not exactly know when—the temple flourished and was a centre of widespread veneration, while the surrounding area was ruled by a petty chieftain who had made himself independent of the rajah whose capital was far away. In the court of this petty chieftain was an individual who played the dual role of adviser and jester, and for whom the chieftain evidently had considerable regard.

The temple itself was in charge of a number of priests— all Brahmins—governed by a high priest who was of strong character. As always happens when people of strong minds come into contact with each other, there was a clash of interests between the chieftain, his adviser the jester, and the Brahmin high priest.

Of course, all the details had been long forgotten, but it appeared that the high priest had contrived to trump up charges against his rival, the jester, who had been accused of treachery towards the ruling house. The result was that the unfortunate adviser had been publicly tried, condemned to death for treason, and forthwith thrown down the well alive, but not before he had screamed threats of vengeance against the high priest and all the temple monks.

The sequel to this story was that within a week the high priest was missing, and a couple of days later his body was found floating in the well. The jester had claimed his first victim. Thereafter, at intervals, the other priests disappeared one by one, and their corpses would show up, floating face downwards in the well just like that of their high priest. Other priests came to the temple, but each and

everyone of them met the same fate.

Elaborate ceremonies were held from time to time to exorcise the spirit of the avenging jester, but to no avail, as slowly but surely priest after priest vanished and his drowned body was later found floating on the surface of the water in the well. It took perhaps a hundred years for the avenging spirit of the jester to accomplish its task, but the time came when no priest, however holy he might be, or appear to be, would risk his life by volunteering to officiate in the temple. And that was how the temple and the well came to be deserted and eventually fell into ruin.

The narrator closed his strange tale with a very significant sentence: 'Consider yourself very lucky indeed, sir, that you are alive this morning. That evil spirit could easily have thrown you down the well, as easily as it has destroyed at least a hundred priests in the past!'

Because I'm not a Brahmin priest, I retorted sarcastically, adding, 'Stuff and nonsense. Damned rot!' The words came from me violently, explosively. To say the least, I was annoyed! Did this silly fellow think he could frighten me with such old wives' tales? I fear I was very rude to my unfortunate acquaintance for the next few minutes, for I told him exactly what I thought of his story, and of him for relating it.

The poor fellow's face fell and he walked away abashed. Unabashed, I scowled after him. Then I started packing the Studebaker preparatory to returning home, which did not take me long. I wished my friends goodbye, half-heartedly and rather abruptly, noticing that the man who had told me about the temple was not among them. In the usual hospitable Indian fashion, they pressed me even at that last moment to extend my stay. In answer I pressed the self-starter, shifted the car into gear, and drove away.

I had travelled quite six miles from Sampigehalli when I stopped the Studebaker, switched off the ignition and started to think clearly. I had behaved churlishly for no valid reason. After all, the man had only told me the story as he had heard it from others. It was I who had heard the whistling, had listened to the flapping of wings and seen the strange shadow. It was up to me to believe the tale, or reject it if I could find some better explanation. The sensible thing for me to do would be to try to make further investigation into the matter by talking to more people about it. Most sensible of all would be for me to spend another night at the well to see if the phenomenon was repeated. Instead of doing either of these things, I had acted like a child and cleared off in a huff.

So I turned the car and drove back to the village, where the first thing I did was to seek out my friend and apologize. He readily forgave me saying he understood how I had felt, and was all smiles

again. In fact everybody smiled at my return till I told them that this time I had not come to hunt a tiger but a ghost—the evil spirit who lived down the well at the old temple.

At these words everybody stopped smiling. Then my friend said: 'Sir, I don't want to be rude, but please go back to Bangalore at once rather than do this foolish thing. You might escape from the tiger but not from the evil one.'

That evening, having nothing to fear from the tiger, I did not go to the old temple as early as I had done the previous afternoon. It was nearly six o'clock when I settled down in the place I had earlier occupied behind the parapet of the well. I had brought my rifle along with me in case the tiger should prove to be difficult, but as there was no particular need to keep silent on this occasion, I had allowed myself a large flask of tea, bread, butter and a tin of corned mutton and even some oranges to wind up with, not to mention my battered briar pipe.

There was no sign of the tiger as I settled myself, as quickly and as comfortably as possible, in my old position, arranging the torch, flask, water-bottle and other articles to right and left of me. He might have come out of his hiding place in the holy-of-holies of the temple before my arrival, although I did not think that was likely. In this conjecture I proved to be right. The time was a few minutes after seven and it was growing very cold. The nightjars had begun to call when a stone was dislodged inside the dark opening of the sanctuary and rolled loosely down the bank outside.

I knew the tiger was standing at the opening, looking out to see if it was safe enough to emerge. It might see me now, or might already have seen me; perhaps it remembered my presence at the parapet of the well the evening before. Precisely at that moment I heard the first whistle, loud, rather low and rather long-drawn-out, followed in quick succession by a louder, far higher and shorter whistle. After that there was absolute silence.

I remembered with a sense of shock that on the evening before, the whistling had begun just before the appearance of the tiger. The same thing had happened again. The thought came to me: could it be that the thing that whistled was trying to warn the tiger of my presence?

This notion was dispelled a moment later when the tiger emerged from the dark outline of the temple's entrance, first as an indistinct shape and then as an animal of immense proportions in the early light of the newly-risen moon.

As I had observed the evening before, for some unaccountable reason these loud whistles did not register on the tiger's hearing, although they were very clear to me. The fact was uncanny and was

confirmed the next moment when the three successive whistles were repeated, more insistent and louder than ever. But the tiger took no notice of them. Then I began to hear the flapping of wings again, faintly and as from a distance. The source of the sound was at first difficult to place, till it was brought home to me, with an unpleasant shock, that it came from the bottom of the deep well in front of me.

Meanwhile the tiger was standing still, clearly visible in the early moonlight. It was staring fixedly in my direction. It was evident that the tiger now remembered having seen me there the previous night. I wanted to flash my torch down the well to discover the cause of the flapping sound, but this meant taking my eyes off the tiger, something I was rather reluctant to do. The rumour that this was a man-eater came to my mind once more with renewed force. Supposing this was a fact: I would be at its mercy if it should decide to attack me while I was looking down the well.

The three whistles, coming for the third time, with the closer approach of the flapping sound, got the better of my caution. A quick glance showed the tiger was still looking in my direction when I raised myself to my knees, thrust my head and shoulders over the parapet of the well, extended my right arm with the torch grasped in my hand as far as possible down the well and pressed the button. The bright beam cut into the inky depths, then lost itself in what looked to be a cloud of thick black smoke or vapour that was heaving some distance down the well.

Forgetful of the tiger I stared down the well, transfixed with curiosity, while the cloud that appeared to be issuing from the bottom, and was dense enough to prevent my torch-beam from penetrating it, rose inexorably towards me. It would not take long to reach the surface where I was crouching.

A loud snarl brought me back to an awareness of the danger I was in from the tiger. Quickly I shone the torch in the direction where it had been standing, while I groped for my rifle with the other. But the tiger was not there! Gratefully, I realized it had seen me and bounded away, the snarl I had heard being its protest at my intrusion. In a strange way I missed the tiger, for now I did not have a material antagonist to deal with, but something intangible with which I did not know how to cope. And I can tell you the thought was most unnerving.

The flapping came again; loud, heavy and near. The torchlight, which I directed into the well, showed that the eddying billows of the smoke-cloud were now scarcely five feet from the mouth of the well and that the rays of the torch could not penetrate them. They rose rapidly upwards and soon reached the face of my torch as I held it pointing downwards. My hand began to tremble violently so that the

light danced crazily.

There seemed something indescribably evil about this vapour, and it brought a reaction I had never experienced before. Unlike normal smoke this mist eddied in dense, ribbon-like trails, resembling the coils of a giant snake of interminable length that twisted and wound around and around, in and out and about itself in a seething, restless, engulfing, devouring, never-ending movement.

Soon, it had reached my head and shoulders and engulfed me as I craned myself forward to look down the well. The cloud was far more dense than it had been the previous night, rather like a pea-soup fog that could almost be felt. I am by no means a squeamish person, but for the next few moments I did not know what was happening. The feeling is hard to describe. Perhaps to say that I was taken out of myself would be nearest to the mark, although I realize that such words hardly convey any meaning.

Once again I felt unutterably tired, forlorn, depressed, altogether without hope. A deep and urgent yearning came over me to jump over the parapet and into the well, once and for all to end my misery and unhappiness. It would be such an easy, such a pleasant ending, to the tortures and troubles and trials of living. Such an easy way out! So comfortable and soothing! So Soothing! So Soothing!

And then the gas, or smoke, or whatever it was, lifted. Rather, it cleared the parapet of the well and rose above my head as a dense, heavy, whirling cloud. With its lifting my mind cleared too and I was back to earth once more, remembering in amazement my recent dismal thoughts of throwing myself into the well. The cloud rose higher and higher and thinned out as it mixed with the air. I watched it in my torchlight for a full ten minutes, by which time it must have risen to perhaps fifty feet or more, when it dispersed and I could see it no more.

I put out the torch and sat back to ponder the strange phenomenon. The words of my friend and the story he had told me came back in forceful recollection. I pondered again upon the tale of evil and vengeance, and I remembered with dismay the odd feeling of careless lassitude that had overcome me as the vapour engulfed me and passed over my head: the feeling of despair, and the comforting temptation to end all my troubles merely by jumping down the well into oblivion. I had almost, in fact, fallen a victim to the age-old curse myself. It gave me quite a jolt, I can assure you, to realize that but a few moments earlier I was dispassionately contemplating suicide.

Then there were other aspects of the occurrence that defied explanation. The three strange whistles in quick succession; the unaccountable sound of flapping wings; the fact that the tiger could not hear these sounds; and strangest of all, that the weird thing, or

whatever it was that came from the well, assumed the appearance of a dark cloud.

I walked back to the forest bungalow for the second time, to seek the solace of the battered old armchair, more puzzled, more vexed in mind, more dissatisfied with myself than I had ever been before.

It was in this frame of mind that I finally drove away from Sampigehalli the next morning, after recounting my latest adventure to my village friends. All of them, without exception, had nodded and wagged their heads and repeated in varying phrases the same words, 'We told you so.' The man who had annoyed me the day before said in exultation, 'You were angry with me yesterday. Today you are indeed lucky to be alive. Fate spared you a second time from joining the others who have been drowned in that well. That was because your time had not yet come. But do not sit there for a third night, Sir. For then it might be your time and you will surely jump into the well.'

I might have argued with him and pointed out that, if indeed it was my fate to throw myself into the well on the third night, I would have been compelled to remain at Sampigehalli, whether he or I or anybody else wanted me to leave or not.

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1 See: *The Call of the Man-Eater*.
2 See: *Tiger Roars*.
3 See: *The Call of the Man-Eater*.

Six

The Strange Case of The Gerhetti Leopard

Gerhetti is a tiny village of not even a dozen huts, lying A mile or so from the forest track that wandered in an almost southerly direction from Anchetty to the larger village of Pennagram in the Salem district of Madras state.

It is only seven miles from Anchetty, but to reach Gerhetti your car has to descend the winding track at an almost impossible angle, guaranteed to impose a severe strain upon the best of braking systems, bump across a couple of very rocky streambeds that hold no water for over nine months in the year, and then clamber up an equally winding and impossible gradient. In the old days of the Model T Ford, which were my young days, it would give me childish and utter delight to sit at the steering wheel of my beloved 'Lissom Lizzie', the name painted in large letters upon her rear, press hard upon the left of the three pedals that controlled her, and attain the summit in clouds of steam, billowing from a red-hot engine and a boiling radiator.

On one occasion Lissom Lizzie climbed half-way up that gradient but could not climb any more. I was bound for the forest lodges of Muttur, a dozen miles beyond Gerhetti, where I had arranged with Byra, my aboriginal poojaree friend, to help to catch a crocodile that had become stranded in the Forest department well situated upon the banks of the Chinnar river, and I had to keep that appointment. What was I to do? Praise be to Henry Ford and the wonderful adaptability of the Model T. I turned the car round, placed the hand-lever to my right in a neutral position, pressed upon the centre pedal of the three (which was the reverse pedal in the Model T) and climbed that fearful gradient backwards with ease! The car was strained and so was my neck, but we made it.

A mile or so after reaching the top of the gradient, a narrower track veers to the right, the jungle crowding in upon both sides. Another mile along this track brings one to a water hole on the right side, immediately opposite the driveway leading to the Gerhetti Forest Lodge on the left. This is a delightful little bungalow which, in those days, had but one snag. It was always locked, the reason being that the caretaker, who was also carefree and careless, and did not give a damn anyway, was away on holiday, sometimes at Anchetty but more generally at Pennagram which, although poor of soil, was rich in girls.

And thereby hangs a tale.

In the old British days there was a district Forest Officer (D.F.O.) of the old school type in charge of this area. He had a double-barrelled name, was stickler for rules, and did not like me anyway. The cause of this dislike I could never fathom. Perhaps he disapproved of my wandering about the forests of which he had charge as if they were my own, and he showed his disdain, upon the few occasions I was unfortunate enough to have speak to him, by looking at me distantly, as if I were something the cat had left on the doorstep. This gentleman insisted that before occupying any of the Forest department bungalows in his area, I should apply for his permission and obtain the same in writing. As a matter of fact, this was the rule and still is. But ask anyone who has lived in India and he will agree with me that rules are made only to be broken. Everyone breaks them and enjoys the process. The stricter the rule, the more it has to be broken. At least, everyone seems to feel this way in India; and that being the case, why not I?

However, to avoid coming to grips unnecessarily with this man, I gave him on one occasion a full month's notice in advance, with my request for permission to occupy the Gerhetti Forest Lodge. As I possessed a shooting licence for the area, he could not very well refuse. Back came his written permission in due course, but along with it quite a substantial paragraph warning me not to try to break the rules and regulations in any way, not to cause a forest fire by throwing matches about, not to fail to pay the prescribed rent for the days I was in occupation and so forth.

The glad day dawned at last and I set forth in my Model T for Gerhetti. Fortunately, I had just reached the top of the ghat, when down came the rain in torrents. Model T's never worried about bad weather, and it took more than raindrops to stop a vehicle of that sturdy vintage. By the same standards they expected a passenger to care nothing too, for they were without adequate protection of the sides.

So I was soaking wet when I arrived at the front door of the Gerhetti lodge, to find it fast closed with a lock of outstanding size. And the carefree caretaker was away on his revels.

I had the written permission of the nasty D.F.O. to occupy the place. I had given him a month's notice. His office should have notified the caretaker to welcome me with open doors. Nevertheless, I was locked out. This old bounder, who was so hot upon other people keeping to the rules, had himself foundered! Besides, the rain was coming down in buckets, saturating me and my equipment.

So I staggered around the building and discovered that the bathroom door at the back was weak on its hinges. I put my shoulder

to it and heaved it off its hinges. The door burst open, and that was how I got into the bungalow.

I camped at Gerhetti for the full week for which I had come, but in all that time the caretaker never showed up. Apparently his dates at Pennagram were more important. Then the time came for me to leave. The bathroom door, which had left its hinges 'by accident', could only be pulled to and closed. And there was no one present to receive the rent.

From Bangalore, I sent the rent by post to the D.F.O. and made out a strong case against his carefree caretaker. The storm, I claimed, had 'caused me, in seeking shelter, to slip and fall in the mud, whereupon in an effort to save myself my hand contacted the bathroom door. Unfortunately this mere pressure had caused the hinges, which were of ancient vintage, to give way and the door had opened'. The implication was that the security of this government building was not all it should be.

But the careless caretaker turned out to be less carefree than I had thought. He and his boss worked out as foul a plot as ever was hatched against an innocent, upright, law-abiding, Christian gentleman! The teak armchair from the bungalow and the zinc bathtub in the bathroom were missing. They had been stolen! Either I had stolen them, in which case I was liable under the rules to be prosecuted and jailed for breaking into a government building and stealing part of its furniture. Or my irresponsible action in breaking into the building had rendered it insecure and unsafe, whereafter theft of government property had inevitably ensued, for which I was entirely responsible. I was called upon to reply within seven days, whereafter very severe action was proposed to be taken against me. Not a word was said about the caretaker's absence.

I thought fast. Had the D.F.O. been a less unpleasant individual I would have offered to pay for the missing articles. As matters stood, any such offer would be pounced upon as a clear admission of guilt. Furthermore, no thief in India would go to such a benighted spot to steal an ancient armchair and leaky bathtub, both of which would be of no value, either for his own use or for sale to any villager.

Obviously, the articles had been removed by the carefree but crafty caretaker, or by order of the D.F.O. himself, in order to 'fix' me. I could hardly believe that an English officer would do this kind of thing, however much he disliked me. So the culprit was obviously the caretaker himself. He had done this as a retaliatory act against me, when called upon to explain his absence, as reported by me. But where could the articles be? He would not have tried to sell them, because that would have left a trail. So he must have hidden them.

The obvious answer was that he had hidden them in his

girlfriend's house. So off I went to Pennagram and arrived after midnight, when all were asleep. I aroused my henchaman Ranga, put the case to him and asked him where we should start searching. The question also arose as to how the caretaker could have brought the two cumbersome articles from Gerhetti to Pennagram, a distance of twelve miles. Ranga offered the answer without hesitation. In a bullock-cart, carrying felled bamboos!

From the forest around Gerhetti there was a constant flow of bamboos to Pennagaram, where the Forest department had a timber depot. As an official of the service, although a very minor one, it would be easy for this caretaker to persuade a cartman or two to convey the articles, concealed under the bamboos in a cart, to Pennagram.

More fortunately, Ranga, who had once been a cartman himself, was well acquainted with his confreres. Late though the hour was, he set out to question those that were in town and returned by 4 a.m. to give me the good news that not only had he succeeded in finding two cart-drivers, each of whom had brought one of the articles in his conveyance, but had also found out where they were hidden.

This was an ungodly hour to awaken any solitary sentry, snugly asleep in a police station, but that is exactly what we did soon after. The constable was very indignant. Moreover, claiming to be alone in charge, he declared that he could not leave his post. But when a certain exchange had been made his conscience was softened. Leaving us in charge of the station, he hastened to the police lines and shortly returned with a confederate, who had dressed himself in full uniform as befitted the occasion. This policeman accompanied Ranga and myself to the tiny house occupied, I do admit, by an exceedingly becoming lass. I was obliged to admire the taste in women of the careless but carefree caretaker. But, more important at that moment, there was the old teak armchair and the zinc bathtub, as large as life in a corner of her tiny abode.

The poor girl was arrested and the two articles removed to the police station. Later that morning the sub-inspector (S.I.) arrived, and to him I submitted two written documents. The first was a letter of complaint regarding the theft, backdated by a few days. The second a letter of appreciation, commending and congratulating the S.I. He was delighted. I asked him, as a favour, to release the girl and capture the

caretaker; but looking at me with disapproving eyes, he said he could not do that, for the girl was 'an accessory after the fact', even if she was a comely wench.

To the D.F.O. my lawyer sent a notice for defamation claiming a fabulous sum as damages, with a copy to the Chief Conservator of Forests at Madras. But time was kind to the poor fellow. He was on

the verge of retirement anyhow and he disappeared overnight on furlough, from which he never returned. What gave me the greatest satisfaction, however, was the 'armchair' detection I had displayed in identifying the culprit.

You must forgive me for this digression, but my excuse is the need to let you know that even in the jungles we have our problems. India is a country that demands of its inhabitants a sharpness of wit. And this brings me to another tale.

Ticketless train-travel in India is rife. To try to combat it, the authorities institute many checks, so that in the course of even a short journey one my be required to show one's ticket to 'travelling ticket inspectors' a number of times. Now, an acquaintance of mine who emigrated from India to the U.K. was agreeably surprised to find that there were no ticket-checks on the suburban line on which he travelled to work daily. So he bought no ticket and travelled free for some months until one day he was caught.

All this, however, has nothing whatever to do with the strange leopard I meant to tell you about.

About two furlongs behind the forest lodge at Gerhetti is the small hamlet of the same name, consisting of half a dozen huts. The occupants are woodcutters, who earn a supplementary wage by working as coolies for the Forest department, repairing the road, stealing sandalwood and timber when they can, and poaching deer in the summer months when there is no water in the jungle and the animals come late at night to drink at the water hole which, I have already told you, stands a short distance in front of the lodge at the point where the 'driven-in' turns away from the main track.

The people in this hamlet had a few sheep—keeping goats in a forest area was strictly forbidden in British days, due to the destruction wrought by these animals upon seedlings— and a few fowl. There had been some cattle, but tigers and panthers had wiped them out.

The leopard in this story, being an animal of only average size, had begun its depredations by stealing a fowl here and there when they wandered from the huts to feed among the fallen leaves at the edge of the jungle. The next stage was reached when the leopard decided to go further, raiding the hut in which the fowls were kept by creeping through the wall of thorns and eating up as many as possible, killing or severely injuring the rest of the birds just for fun. It now had to turn to the sheep, there being nothing else to eat, and these it started killing one by one, whenever opportunity offered. I had been told about this leopard, but as it was reported to be quite a harmless beast—indeed, almost friendly in its habits—I had thought no more about it.

The first time I laid eyes on this animal was about 4-30 one evening. I was reclining in the armchair on the veranda of the lodge, sipping tea, when a movement at the water hole, the farther bank of which was visible from where I was sitting, caught my attention. The sun was shining brightly and the day had been a hot one. Normally, no wild animal would be afoot. The movement came again and some yellow object thrust itself out from the wall of reeds that bordered the pool. I could not make out what it was.

Perhaps a minute later, without perceptible further movement, the object turned into a panther as it emerged fully from behind the reeds. It was gazing fixedly towards the forest bungalow, knowing no doubt that if there was any danger about, it would be in this direction. I did not move in my chair. After a close scrutiny that lasted perhaps three minutes, the leopard decided all was safe. It stooped to drink, but stopped twice to look up at the bungalow to make sure that all was well.

The second time I saw this animal was when it chased a junglecock into a tree. I was returning from an early-morning prowl when the junglecock emitted its shrill alarm cry a few yards ahead and flapped heavily upwards.

'Cekh! Cekh! Cekh! Cekh!' screeched the cock, and I halted in my tracks. No doubt it had seen or heard me. But I was wrong, for an instant later a panther bounded out of the undergrowth and raced after the bird, to clamber quickly but futilely up the tree on which it had settled. The junglecock screeched again and this time flew far away, while the leopard, warned that all was not well, turned its head to look back sharply.

That was when it saw me. Releasing its hold, the panther fell back lightly to the ground, arched its back for a moment while curling its tail high above, for all the world like a friendly tabby, then turned and padded silently away, disappearing in the bushes.

The third time I saw this animal under peaceful circumstances was when I was chugging along in my Model T. I had passed the Gerhetti bungalow and the water hole, and was continuing along the track which, it will be remembered, branches off from the main route to Muttur and Pennagram.

No cars came that way in those days and bullockcarts were few. Cattle passed now and again, in the hot weather when the forest had dried up, on their way to the village of Natrapalayam and the Cauvery river, seven or eight miles away, where there was still some grazing to be had. The few people living in this area carried their loads on their heads or, when these were too heavy, on the backs of ponies or donkeys, the latter for preference because they were cheaper. The branches of the trees met above the narrow trail, for which reason the

already tattered hood of the Model T had to be put down and the windshield lowered. Nevertheless, it was often needful to lie sideways on the front seat to allow a bough to scrape over the steering wheel.

Turning a sharp corner, I saw close ahead a fairly stout branch extending across the track, and lying along this bough was a panther that had evidently taken up this position in the hope of being able to ambush any animal passing beneath. It had not heard the car as I had been coursing downhill, semidepressing the left-hand pedal of Lissom Lizzie that served as gear-cum-clutch.

The panther rose on the branch when I was almost beneath it, then panicked and sprang clumsily, clearing the rear seat but landing on the back of the car, from where it took off again into the bushes, but not before the claws of its hind feet, in finding a purchase to make that second leap, tore a gaping hole in the already tattered upholstery.

There is a village along this track named Jungalpalayam. It is about half-way between Gerhetti and Natrapalayam, being two and a half miles from each. I knew it as the 'happy village', for the folks living in this hamlet, although far from civilization, medical help, schools, places of amusement and so-called cooperative centres that never seem to cooperate in anything, were always contented and laughing. It did one good to visit this little place and chat with its inhabitants. They seemed singularly free from the political consciousness that is such a dominating factor in India.

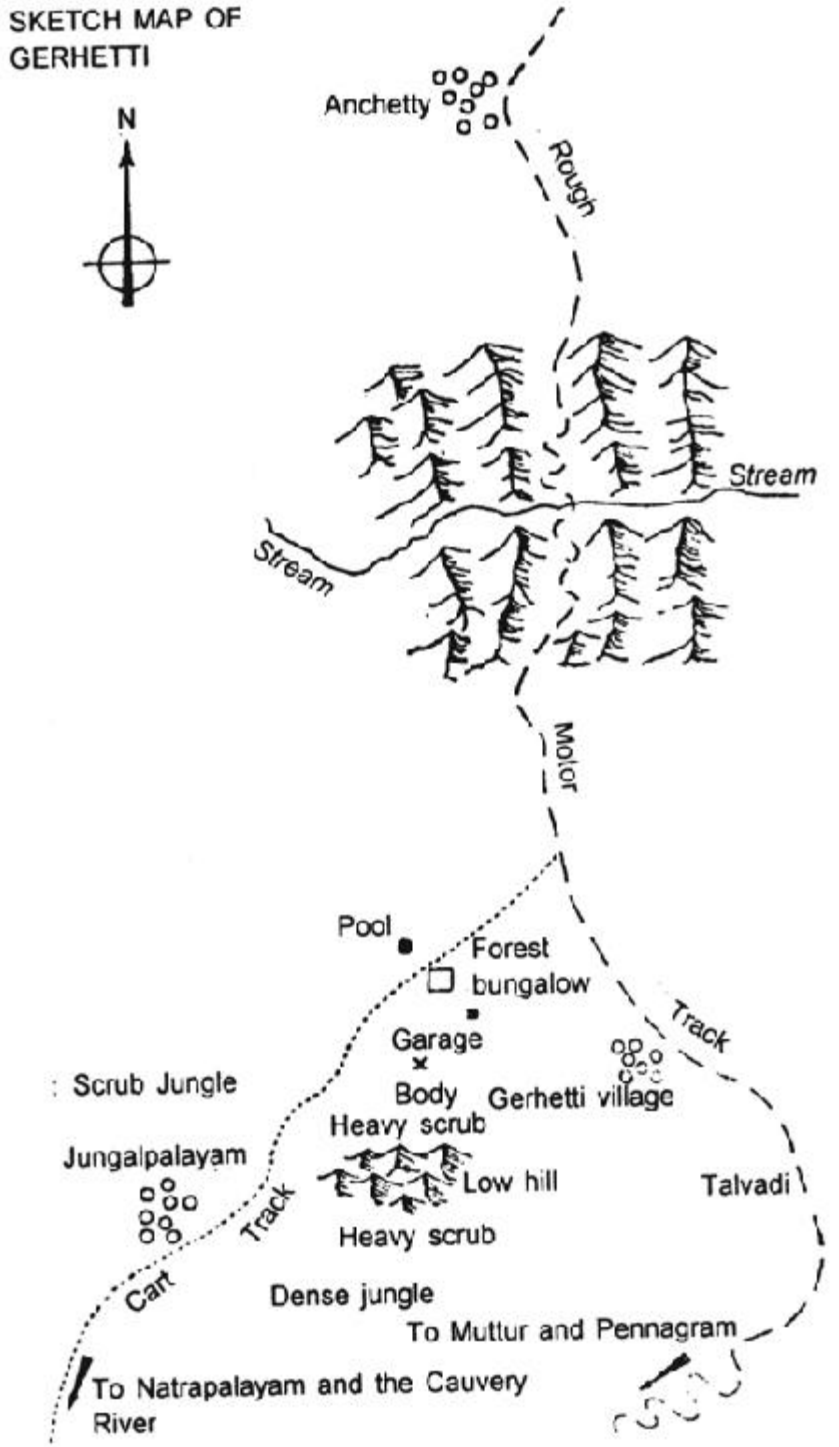
Each month, when the moon is at its full, and on two days before and two days after, the villagers would play games in the moonlight, commencing an hour or so after their evening meal, which might be at about eight o'clock, and continuing till midnight. Modesty forbade that the men and women should play together, so the women would form a circle in the centre of the village, while the men would go to the village threshing floor, a cleared space about fifty yards to one side of the hamlet. The women would mostly sing and dance, while the men played a variety of games, the most popular of which was *balchik* or *kabbaddee,* although in this particular hamlet it was known as *goddoogoddoo,* a form of the popular game of salts, played widely throughout India.

The rules of this game are simple. A straight line is drawn with charcoal on the ground, and two teams of from five to seven members each assemble on either side. Play starts when by a member from, let us say, Team A (although the villagers call the teams by such names as 'frogs', grasshoppers', or even less complimentary ones like 'illegitimates' or 'bastards') approaches the base line, muttering repeatedly and rapidly the word *kabbaddee* (or *goddoogoddoo),* crosses it while still muttering incessantly, audibly, and with his fingertips lightly touches a member of Team B (perhaps called the 'impotents' or

'eunuchs' or some other rude name), then springs back to the charcoal base line before any of the members of Team B can hold him down.

The point is that the man from Team A must keep on muttering *kabbaddee* (or *goddoogoddoo)* loudly and without ceasing. Should a member or more of Team B succeed in grabbing him and holding him down, so that he cannot get back to the charcoal base line, a point is lost to his team also.

After the man from Team A has scored a success or failure, as the case may be, the turn of approaching the line falls to a man from Team B, and so on. The winning side is that which first attains a predetermined number of points, usually twenty-one. Sometimes a small bet is attached to the result, each member of a side ending up by winning—or losing— half a rupee in the course of the evening, somewhat less than a shilling.



On many a moonlight night have I joined the villagers of

Jungalpalayam in a game of *goddoogoddoo.* I was a young man in those days and as hard as nails. Nevertheless, muttering *goddoogoddoo* aloud without stop, while dodging to avoid eager, agile, clutching village youths, would leave my lungs at bursting point. The women would cease their singing and dancing to gather around and witness the discomfiture of the *dorai,* which invariably happened, although the side on which I played would claim I was no liability to them, in order to make me feel at home. I would walk or motor back to Gerhetti in the early hours of the morning with the moon setting behind the jungleclad hills to the west, often horrified to find myself muttering ' *goddoogoddoo—goddoogoddoo'* automatically.

It was then the leopard struck! Evidently the branch overhanging the track from Gerhetti to Jungalpalayam, on which I had surprised it, was a favourite ambush for this animal, for it launched itself one day from this very bough upon a donkey laden with tamarind-fruit packed into two sacks, one on each side, which the donkey's owner was taking to market at Pennagram. The man had stopped to pluck and munch a wild wood-apple nut and the donkey had turned the bend in the track fifty yards ahead, when the thud of a falling body and a hoarse gurgling sound were heard.

Not associating the noise with any calamity to his donkey, the man feared an elephant might be ahead of him. For this reason, he approached the corner slowly, while keeping a sharp lookout all round. But to his horror he saw his poor donkey dead and dragged to one side of the track, with the panther crouched against its belly, its fangs still buried in the donkey's throat, enjoying the warm blood that trickled from the severed vein.

Then the man, who ordinarily would have run away and indeed was already prepared to run from the elephant he expected to see, lost his temper and rushed at the panther whirling the stave he held in his hand. The leopard, excited by the kill it had just made, with the warmth of its victim against him and the warmer blood trickling through its jaws, was in no mood to relinquish his feast. In fact, I suppose it actually had no opportunity to do so before the angry man was upon him.

The stave thudded down across the panther's back and the panther leapt upon the man seeking for his throat, but being diverted by the long black beard this villager had grown, bit the man's chest instead. The man lost his balance, toppled backwards, and began to scream.

I happened to have come to Gerhetti at that time, but was far away at the moment, on the slopes of a hillside behind the hamlet, searching for a particular kind of beetle for my cousin who is an ardent collector. I heard those screams faintly, and thinking some man

was being done to death by an elephant, ran in their direction. Most regrettably, I had left my rifle in the forest lodge. People who go catching beetles do not ordinarily carry firearms, and there was no danger to be envisaged in the area at the time from a man-eater or rogue elephant.

The screams I had heard so faintly had stopped by now, so that I was left guessing as to the point of their origin; but working on the belief that an elephant had attacked a man, I guessed that whatever had happened had taken place somewhere along the track to Jungalpalayam. So I ran in its general direction, stumbling through undergrowth and between bushes and trees till at last I reached the track.

There was nothing to be seen. Should I turn right or left? The sound had seemed so far away that I decided to turn towards Jungalpalayam and veered left, padding along as noiselessly as possible and expecting to come upon an enraged elephant at any moment.

Calling aloud but receiving no answer, I had traversed the better part of a furlong when I came upon the victim lying beside his dead donkey. The panther had left him; perhaps his screams had frightened the animal away, or may be at this, its first encounter with one of the human race, the leopard still felt some of its inherent fear of man. The man's eyes flickered open when I called to him and he managed to tell me his name was Subramaniam, that he had come from Pennagram for tamarind, and of how the panther had come to attack him. Then he lost consciousness. I lifted him over my shoulder with the intention of carrying him to the forest lodge, from whence I could take him in my car to hospital at Bangalore.

Alas, I had just reached the bungalow and laid him on the floor of the veranda, when he began to show signs of imminent death, while blood began to pour from his mouth and the terrible wounds in his chest. It was clear that his lungs had been punctured, and as I picked him up again to put him in my car he died. I will not dwell on the trouble I had in telling the authorities all that had happened, but while proceedings were still going on I returned to warn the people of Gerhetti, Jungalpalayam and Natrapalayam that the leopard might possibly turn dangerous.

Surprisingly enough, nothing happened for some months. Then the dreaded epidemic of cholera came to Pennagram and from there spread far and wide, even as far as Natrapalayam. Two or three persons died in this remote village, and because they had died of an infectious disease the villagers threw the bodies into the jungle to rot instead of burying or burning the corpses as in the normal way.

Perhaps the panther ate some of this flesh, although no one knew

for certain, as no one would be bold enough to go near such a corpse. Otherwise the advent of the man-eater and the reason for the animal becoming one are shrouded in mystery.

The trouble began when a boy who had gone to the water hole at Gerhetti with his pitcher did not return. There was no reason for his absence other than supposed idleness, so his father went to look for him in the evening, carrying a stout stick to lay across the boy's back while he was still asleep. The father found his son's broken water-pot, dropped when it was full and therefore upon the return journey. He saw the boy's blood on the grass and the imprint of a panther's pugs where it had been walking down the main track before it saw the boy and pounced upon him from the wayside. A drag-mark indicated in which direction the body had been taken.

Panthers being far smaller, shorter and weaker than tiger, are unable to carry away their kills clear of the ground. They have to drag their dead victims along, for which reason they do not go far before starting to eat. Tigers, which are not only taller but immeasurably stronger, are able to lift a victim as heavy as a buffalo clear of the ground. Moreover, when a tiger intends to take its kill to some distant spot before starting to eat, it seizes its prey by the neck and, with a quick turn of its head, throws the dead body over its back, thereby supporting the weight evenly on all four legs. In this manner, tigers have been known to carry their kills for great distances, so that in the case of a man-eating tiger, their human kills, as often as not, cannot be found.

Returning to my story: the father hastened back to Gerhetti hamlet, called on its few inhabitants for help and, armed with sticks and stones, the small party followed the drag-mark. They had not far to go. What was left of the boy lay under a bush just on the other side of the water hole.

From that day nobody would move alone in the jungle. At least four men would form a party, arming themselves with wood-choppers, axes or stout staves. The news spread to Jungalpalayam, Natrapalayam, Pennagram and Anchetty. Everyone was on the lookout for the panther.

Strangely enough, the theft of an occasional fowl or sheep by a leopard still went on. Most of the people in the area had, at one time or the other, seen the harmless panther I had myself encountered upon three occasions, so nobody associated it with the animal that had struck the tamarind-merchant down and had later devoured the boy. The man-eater was thought to be some passing beast, or a leopard that had become inordinately hungry to the verge of starvation, due to sickness or wounds. A few even subscribed to the notion that the panther was mad, having eaten of the cholera corpses. For man-eaters

in this region were practically unknown; there had been a couple of man-eating tigers in the past, but they had operated far away, in the region of Kempekerai. As for a man-eating panther, nobody could remember having heard of one.

A third victim followed the boy, this time a woman who was returning from the well after bathing her two-year-old child. The water in this well was very brackish and could not be used for drinking or cooking; it could be used only for washing purposes. Unaccountably the leopard did not touch the child, contenting itself with killing the mother and dragging her corpse into a *nullah* a few yards beyond the well. The wails of the infant attracted the villagers, who went to investigate.

With this tragedy, the alarm spread in right earnest far and wide. Woodcutting and all traffic in the jungle came to a dead stop, and the poachers who by night haunted the few water-holes in the forest put away their muskets and vintage muzzle-loaders until the advent of more propitious times.

My tenant at Anchetty, a young man named Narayan who cultivated the small plot of land I own there but has never bothered to pay rent, brought me the news, with a request from the *patel* of Anchetty, who was also nominally the head of the Gerhetti hamlet, to come and shoot the panther. I was tied up with urgent work at Bangalore just then and told Narayan I would come in a week, sending him back with a message to the *patel* to this effect, and an additional word of warning to the people of Gerhetti to move about only in groups and never alone. Man-eating panthers as a rule, being inherently cowardly, attack only under cover of darkness, unlike the man-eating tiger, which is braver and bolder and attacks at any time. In this respect the Gerhetti leopard was different; it had taken all its three victims in broad daylight.

On the day before I arrived at Gerhetti the panther struck for the fourth time, and the victim turned out to be the son of the bungalow-watcher, that carefree character who had tried to frame me with the armchair and bathtub. The panther took its victim in the early hours of the morning.

After the affair of the bathtub and armchair, the father had lost his job with the Forest department and had become a minor forest contractor, purchasing at public auction the right to gather fruit, various medicinal seeds and leaves, henna, honey, deers' horns that had been shed, and other lesser items. In this business the son played an active part, and at the time of his death the lad had come to Gerhetti to induce some of the poojarees living there to help him to raid the combs of the wild rock-bees that had hung their hives on the higher rock-faces of a low mountain named Periyamalai, some four

miles from Gerhetti.

The lad, whose name was Nataraj, had successfully accomplished his mission and had succeeded in gathering some four or five kerosene tins of this wild honey. On an average, each of these tins held the equivalent of twenty-four bottles of honey, each of which in turn would sell for three rupees. The trip would thus earn him about three hundred rupees.

Well satisfied, he returned with the tins to Gerhetti, where he decided to spend the night, as rumours had reached the hamlet that a herd of wild elephants had recently come up from the Cauvery river and were roaming in the ravines of Talvadi, through which the road to the market at Pennagram passed. Nataraj had no intention of risking his precious honey by exposing it to wild elephants.

The forest lodge (the one from which his father had taken the furniture) was locked, but the garage was open: in fact, it had no doors! So Nataraj decided to spend the night in the garage, along with his tins of honey.

In the early hours of the morning, the people in the hamlet of Gerhetti said they heard his screams for help, but being few in number and moreover unarmed, they fastened the doorways of their huts more securely and waited for dawn. With daylight, a number of them eventually came to the garage to see what had happened. Nataraj was nowhere to be seen. Signs of a struggle were evident. There was blood on the earthen floor and one of the tins of honey had been overturned, attracting thousands of ants. There was also the impression of something heavy having been dragged across the ground and out of the open door into the jungle, which began ten yards behind.

The panther had not bothered to take him very far. His head, arms and legs, the portions that a panther, and even a man-eating tiger, is rather fastidious about and leaves for a later meal, lay scattered about in mute testimony of the panther's appetite. Rather small, as the pugs indicated the marauder to be, it had eaten a lot of meat.

I arrived at Gerhetti at ten that morning and was in time to see the remains before the police turned up from Anchetty and began their tedious and fruitless questioning. Why had I come? they asked. Had I an arms licence? A gun licence? A car licence? A driver's licence? Any question but those that concerned the panther.

I asked them to leave the remains where they were and go away as soon as possible, since this would give me a chance of sitting over what was left of Nataraj and perhaps shooting the man-eater. There was a possibility that it might return in the afternoon, and there was also the probability that it would return after dark.

The *daffedar* (head-constable or sergeant), who represented the

party in the absence of his Sub-Inspector, flatly refused. He said the remains would have to stay where they were till his boss could see them for himself. And as he had to return to Anchetty, he would leave the two constables who had accompanied him to watch over these remains till the Sub-Inspector turned up, later in the evening perhaps, more probably the next morning.

At hearing the *daffedar's* words, there was unanimous disapproval of his scheme by his subordinates. One of them stated with some heat that he had not eaten his breakfast that morning, and certainly could not wait for it till next day. The other man pleaded that he was suffering from a servere cold. To this the *daffedar* rejoined that he had not heard him cough even once that day. Whereupon the constable coughed prolongedly!

Orders are orders, the *daffedar* affirmed sternly, and stalked away, to mount his bicycle and ride away to Anchetty. The two policemen stared at each other and at me, till I made them a sign in unspoken, but otherwise universally known language, that gave them the general idea; 'chins up, boys; every cloud has a silver lining'. At least this one did for them, and in a very literal sense, for with the *daffedar's* departure the two policemen were only too willing themselves to depart even if it was only as far as the nearby hamlet. Anything to get out of this dreadful place, away from those blank, staring eyes in the dead, accusing face. I was left to my own devices and the immediate problem of finding somewhere to hide and await the killer's possible return.

As so frequently happens there was no place that offered concealment. This is understandable as man-eaters—both tigers and panthers—carry or drag their kills into sheltered, dense undergrowth in order that they may enjoy their meal undisturbed. They do not leave their kills under some convenient tree from which they can be shot! There was a thick growth of lantana bushes and the panther had dragged the body of its victim between two of these bushes, where it had eaten most of it. Any attempt at constructing a hide in the vicinity would stick out like a sore thumb, and the panther would never put in an appearance. All said and done, my contemplated ambush seemed out of the question.

I thought and thought, and finally came up with an idea. It is rather difficult to describe, so I have produced a sketch which I hope may convey some notion of my scheme.

To the north of the spot where lay what was left of Nataraj was the forest lodge and the garage. To the east, not very far away, stood the hamlet and more or less open ground. To the west was light scrub, through which led the *path* from Gerhetti to Jungalpalayam. To the south was heavier scrub, flanked by a low hill. I had already walked

along the *path* to the western side. No tracks of the panther coming or going showed on the sandy surface. So the man-eater had come from the hillock to the south and had returned that way.

My plan was to hide in the garage till I could hear it eating—at least I hoped I would be able to hear it. Then I would tiptoe out of the garage to the front of the bungalow, down the pathway to Jungalpalayam, and cut back from it to get between the panther and the hillock, in which direction I was sure the feline would beat its retreat.

Finally, when in a satisfactory position, I would throw some stones (previously gathered and kept ready in my pocket) as hard as possible in the direction of the garage, hoping the missile would sail over the feasting feline and fall beyond it. This would frighten it and cause it to come bounding blindly towards its only line of retreat, southwards towards the hillock, where I would be in hiding and awaiting it. Panthers have no sense of smell, so it would not be able to scent me while I tiptoed down the pathway. But they have acute hearing and it might hear me if I made the slightest sound. That was a risk I would have to take.

As an afterthought, I decided to tear up the khaki shirt I was wearing and hang strips of it on the bushes bordering the pathway, so that if the leopard did happen to break in that direction (towards the west), the sight of these strips of cloth fluttering in the breeze might turn it back again towards the south, the hillock—and me! It would not break towards the east because of the hamlet, or towards the north, as the bungalow stood there.

I do not usually tear up my shirts, particularly when wearing nothing underneath, but there was no alternative, as I was carrying no rags of any kind and the spare shirt I had brought in the car was a shade better than the one upon my back. So I removed my shirt and tore it into long narrow strips. In this way, I made some eight or ten lengths which I proceeded to tie to the lantana and other bushes bordering the pathway. They were out of sight of where the panther would be eating, but it would immediately spot them if it decided to break westwards towards the pathway, when I began throwing my stones from that direction. It would have been better if the strips had been of white or coloured material, rather than khaki, but one does not wear a white shirt when hunting.

Lastly, I went to the little hamlet to the east of the bungalow and cautioned its inhabitants, including the two constables, not to stir out for the rest of the day. I could hardly tell you my advice was unnecessary. With the killing and eating of Nataraj within a few yards of their huts, the inmates had already shut themselves up as securely as they could.

So that it should not be in the view of the panther, I pushed the Model T in which I had come to the front of the forest lodge. From there it was out of sight of the garage and any panther that might show itself from behind. And I took all the things I had in the car in the form of bedding, food, water, and the shotgun that I had brought as a spare weapon, into the garage. Here I would stay till daylight the following morning, hoping against hope that the leopard would return to what was left of its meal.

All this had taken up to half an hour to noon, and the sun blazed down mercilessly on the dry forest that throbbed to the sound of the cicadas, the cooing of the lesser speckled doves, and the calls of the black-bodied and orange-winged crow-pheasant that was diligently searching for birds' eggs, lizards and caterpillars by the edge of the jungle a few paces away.

The hours dragged by and the heat grew more intense, rising from the ground in shimmering waves. Even the crow-pheasant "felt it and gave up his search, although the tireless cicadas continued to drone out their monotonous dirge.

The hours came and went while I strained my ears for the sound of crunching bones that would announce the killer's return. Not a sound did I hear other than the scream of a king vulture high in the sky. It must have spotted the remains long ago, but being those of a human being the 'king' had delayed its earthwards plunge that would be an invitation to all other vultures for miles around to foregather for a feast.

Five o'clock came, bringing a noticeable cooling of the atmosphere and a sharpening of the vulture's appetite. It delayed no longer, but plummeted to earth with the rattling rush of the wind through the tough feathers of its outstretched wings, to land with a faint thud in the vicinity of the kill. Soon other vultures would follow and nothing would be left of the panther's kill beyond cleanly-picked bones. The leopard, if it should come that night, would find nothing to eat and would wander away!

Four or five vultures joined the king at intervals, although the huge birds still hesitated to begin their meal. Nataraj's head, being left intact with its staring eyes, kept them away.

Time dragged by, and with the advent of evening the chorus of roosting birds began its tumultuous farewell to the day that is music to the ears of those who love the jungle. 'Kuck-kya-kya-khuckm!' crowed junglecocks from the foot of the hillock; 'Kee-kok! Kee-kok! Kee-kok!' challenged a partridge higher up, and 'Kee-kok-kok! Kee-kok-kok! Kee-kok-kok!' came his rival's reply from the summit of the hill. 'Wack! Wack! kuker-rawack!' growled spurfowl to each other, while far away a peacock joined the chorus 'Zank! Mia! Mia! Mia-oo-

ow!'

There cames a heavy flapping of wings as the 'king' and its equally cowardly companions rose ponderously from the ground to perch on some neighbouring tree. They would wait till morning and their appetites would certainly be sharpened.

Darkness began to fall; there was a deep silence that could almost be felt. Then 'Chuck! Chuck! Chuck! Chuck-ooooo!' trilled the nightjar and 'Whooo! Whooo! Whooo!' hooted a horned owl. I fixed the two clamps that held my torch firmly to the barrel of my rifle and adjusted the beam to form a spot. Soon after that it was night. The leopard had not put in an appearance and my deeply-laid scheme appeared to be coming to naught.

I will not weary you with a description of the half-dozen hours that followed. Indeed, there is nothing to tell you, for nothing happened. The moon, that was now on the wane, had risen late, and should the panther come to its kill I would not be able to follow my plan, for the night would not be bright enough to see it when it came bounding up the hillside after being frightened by the stones I was going to throw. I would either have to let it eat, or to try creeping up on it, something that would be very difficult to accomplish and was not at all to my liking.

With these reflections I must have dozed off. Then something awoke me with a start. I could not say what it was. It was not a sound I could hear, but a feeling of deadly peril seemed to close over me. It was oppressive and heavy; it could almost be felt.

For a moment I put it down to imagination, but the sense of danger remained and became very real. It seemed to close down upon me. Without doubt something, somewhere, was threatening me.

Then I realized what it was. The man-eater was close by! That strange sixth sense that I have felt in times of extreme peril, and was to save my life so may times thereafter, was telling me as if in spoken words that the leopard was about to attack.

I closed my hands over my .405 and, without moving, I strained my eyes to look in every direction. Moonlight framed the rectangular doorway of the garage, with the rear of the forest bungalow in the centre of the scene. Then something moved ever so slightly at the bottom left-hand corner of this moonlit screen. Something black and slightly undulating. I could not quite see what it was, because it lay within the area of darkness thrown by the garage in which I was hiding and only the background of dim moonlight had drawn my attention to the faint movement near by.

The shadow moved ever so slightly and the faintest hissing sound reached my straining ears. A cobra? Or could it be the man-eater?

Luckily I had made not the least movement. Had I done so, the

creature might have attacked when it realized that it had been discovered in its attempt to surprise me. But now movement—and very quick movement at that—was called for.

Springing to my feet I threw myself backwards, and was brought to an abrupt halt by the wall behind me. At the same time, I pointed the muzzle of my rifle forwards and pressed the switch of the torch. Although the beam blinded it, the man-eater launched its attack.

In describing the few moments that followed, I should write humbly and with a sense of gratitude. For it is not well to boast that 'with one shot I killed it', for any person even with a rudimentary experience of wild animals will tell you that a sambar can carry nine bullets in its body and move for miles, a bison fifteen, a wild elephant sometimes twenty-five, and a tiger or panther a great many before it falls dead. And it can tear you to pieces before it dies.

Then again the cartridge may be a dud, the cap may misfire, or the animal may turn aside just as you fire. Anything can happen. Suffice it to say that my bullet hit its mark by sheer luck and killed the leopard even while it was in midair, although to make certain I fired two more into the writhing body at my feet.

The sub-inspector arrived creditably early next morning. He was not happy to find that most of Nataraj's bones, including his head, had been taken away by the hyenas and jackals during the night.

Seven

The Lakkavalli Man-Eater

If you were to visit the township of tarikere in the western parts of Mysore state, you would find two motorable roads open to you. On these, at a distance of not more than four or five miles from the town itself, if you had the time to stop and listen, you would hear many stories from the villagers about the depredations of tigers.

The first of these roads leads roughly southwestwards from Tarikere, passing in a curve through the village of Lingadhalli, to the south of the high horseshoe range of mountains known as the Baba Budans, crossing its lower slopes at the hamlet of Santaveri, and continuing to the town of Chikmagalur, about twenty miles away.

The second road leads northwestwards, passing the eastern and northeastern slopes of those same mountains, before curving through two hamlets, named Lakkavalli and Umblebyle, to the town of Bhadravati which itself is barely ten miles from Tarikere, by a third and more direct road.

The first and second roads in this way circumvent the southern and eastern slopes of the Baba Budan range, and the tigers that cross the hump of the mountains from the deep valley to the west and north, ringed in by these mountains, find themselves either in the vicinity of the hamlet of Santaveri on the southern road, or in the area known as the Laulbagh, west of the eastern road.

These should be kept well in mind: the hamlet of Santaveri and the area known as the Laulbagh. For it was at these places and in the area between them that the adventure with the tiger, about which you are now going to hear, took place. Santaveri, at the height of 4,500 feet above sea level, is a rocky, wild and thickly forested region, while the Laulbagh, perhaps thirty to thirty-five miles away as the crow flies, although more than a thousand feet lower and far less rocky, is correspondingly more thickly forested.

I happened to be visiting my old friend, Dick Bird, who was the postmaster at Santaveri and in private life one of the most famous tiger-hunters in the district, having shot all his tigers with a .12 bore shotgun, spurning the use of a rifle.

'Jock,' he asked me, 'have you heard about the tiger that has turned up around Kemangundi?'

I should explain that Kemangundi is about half-way between Santaveri and the Laulbagh area, and that Dick always calls me 'Jock'. For I have lived in so many places and hunted in so many forests and

in so many different climates, with different fauna and flora, and have done so many different things, that I have become a sort of Jekyll and Hyde with a variety of names and nicknames. Very old friends call me 'Jock', 'Scotchie', or 'Scotch', while those met more recently address me as 'Andy', 'Kenneth', 'Ken' and 'KDS'.

At school they called me 'Snake Charmer', because of my fondness for producing these reptiles from inside my shirt and releasing them in such places as Sunday school, the school chapel, the classroom, the dining and study halls, and in cinemas and other congested spots. This was long ago, of course, and I have not been addressed as 'Snake Charmer' for some years, having dropped the habit of releasing the reptiles in public.

Most embarrassing of all, young Dudhwalla, my son's friend, insists upon calling me 'Dot'. Personally, I do not see the least resemblance or slightest connection between myself and 'any small mark with a pen or sharp point', which the dictionary gives as the meaning of 'dot'. So, because of the variety of names by which I am addressed, and being somewhat absentminded, I occasionally become confused and look around for the party addressed.

But to return to Dick's question.

'No,' I replied, 'I haven't been in the area for quite a while. I used to operate a lot in Salem district, as you know, but have had to extend my wanderings to the Nilgiris and into Andhra state. Tigers are still plentiful there.'

'Well, there are quite a few still,' Dick continued. 'But ordinary ones. You know, cattle-lifters. Snatch and grab beasts that haunt the cattle-herds. The animal I have mentioned appears to be a little different, though.'

He then went on to explain that reports from herdsmen stated a very large tiger had recently formed the habit of attacking their herds even while they were still on the roads and being driven to the grazing grounds. Before their very eyes it would seize and kill the fattest and choicest cow and carry her off, slung over its shoulders. This had happened several times and but a few miles from Santaveri itself, on the road I have told you about that led from Tarikere to Chikmagalur. The same sort of thing was reported to have taken place on another, smaller road, leading to a hillock

named Kemangundi, which branched off the main Tarikere-Chikmagalur road shortly after passing through the village of Lingadhalli.

Dick went on to relate that two or three herdsmen had attempted to defend their charges by trying to frighten the tiger into relinquishing the carcase of the victim as it was carrying it away, by shouting and throwing stones.

They had soon desisted, however, when this tiger, instead of leaving the carcase and running away, had dropped the cow and charged in their direction—whereupon they had fled. Investigations later showed that the tiger had returned after chasing the herdsmen away, picked up the cow and made off with it. This tiger seemed to favour carrying its victim sluing across its shoulders rather than holding it by the neck or throat and dragging it along the ground.

We discussed this point and agreed that the indications were that either the tiger was an exceptionally bold animal— perhaps an old male—or that it intended carrying the carcase a long way before devouring it, perhaps to some distant cave, or other lair, should it happen to be a tigress with cubs. The animal was wise enough to realize that dragging its kill for a long distance would entail getting it caught in bushes and thorns; it therefore preferred to lift the carcase bodily.

'If only I would get some leave in this damned department,' Dick complained, 'I would bag it by hook or crook. But to get even two or three days' casual leave entails a hell of a fuss. A replacement for me has to be called from Tarikere or Chikmagalur, and the superintendent acts like mad. That's what comes of being a postmaster.'

My visit over, I returned to Bangalore and forgot all about the tiger. In any case, I was not interested in cattle-lifters.

Some months passed until, one morning, I happened to go to the district Magistrate's Court in Bangalore to purchase some government stamp paper, of which I was in need, when I met an Indian gentleman at the stamp vendor's booth. He was grumbling because the particular denomination of stamp paper he wanted was not available, nor were any smaller denominations that would add up to the total amount required.

I purchased the paper I needed, which was of a much higher denomination and was available.

'What name?' the vendor asked me, preparing to enter this on the back of the stamp paper, as required by rules.

'K.D.S. Anderson,' I replied slowly, spelling out the Anderson so that he could write it correctly.

The Indian gentleman with us was staring hard at me. After entering my name and receiving payment, the vendor handed me the stamp paper, and the gentleman spoke.

'Excuse me, sir,' he asked, 'but are you the Mr. Anderson who shoots tigers?'

'Well, I suppose so,' I answered with a smile. 'At least I don't know of any other Anderson who has the bad habit.' Then, as an afterthought I added, 'Perhaps you mean my son?'

'My name is Venkatasubbarao,' the man said. 'I'm the Assistant

Chief Engineer working on the Lakkavalli Dam Project, near Tarikere. You see, when the vendor asked your name and you replied that it was Anderson, I pricked up my ears. I've heard of you shooting tigers all over the place. You must really come to Lakkavalli, sir. Come as my guest. I have large quarters and can put you up conveniently. You will be quite comfortable and I will make all the needful *bandobast* for you to shoot the man-eater.'

'What man-eater?' I asked in surprise.

'Haven't you heard?' he answered, evidently taken aback. 'Why, it came out in the newspaper three days ago. But come along and have a coffee with me and I'll tell you all about it.'

There is a restaurant, known as 'Tiffin Room', within a stones's throw of the Magistrate's Court, and there Venkatasubbarao and I went. Over not one, but several cups of coffee, he related the following story.

A large tiger had appeared on the road from Tarikere that led past the eastern slopes of the Baba Budan mountain range, and passed through Lakkavalli before going on in a circle to Bhadravati. It had begun by killing cattle belonging to the many herds that were taken to graze in the jungle bordering the roadside. The tiger was reputed to carry off its victims across its back, and if any of the herdsmen dared to interfere, this animal chased them off with loud growls. Invariably it would disappear in a western direction, into the jungles of the 'Laulbagh'.

Time passed. Nothing happened to any herdsmen, but the tiger continued to exact its toll. Naturally, the herdsmen grew more angry with the tiger and became correspondingly bolder. Equally naturally, the tiger grew more angry with them and grew bolder itself.

The day dawned when the anger of both sides came to a head. The tiger was moving off with a particularly fat cow across its shoulders when a herdsman, more plucky than any of his companions, rushed after it and hurled his stave. As was its custom, the tiger dropped the body of the victim and, roaring and growling horribly, charged the man, no doubt expecting him to bolt as so many others had done before.

But this man did not run away. Maybe he was braver than the others. Maybe he was stricken stiff with fear. Maybe, having cast his staff away, he thought it useless to run anyhow. Of course, not being present himself, Venkatasubbarao did not know what really happened. What he did know was that the tiger killed and ate the herdsman before walking off again with its fat victim, the cow.

Word got around and the herdsmen in the Lakkavalli area stopped interfering with the tiger. When it attacked a herd, the men in charge promptly fled, and the tiger, politely, did not bother to chase

them any more. But other herdsmen, farther off, had not heard of what had transpired near Lakkavalli. They continued their old tactics of trying to drive the tiger off when it attacked their animals. The tiger, having come now to realize how helpless his human victim at Lakkavalli had proved to be, and emboldened by that experience, killed two herdsmen one after the other at Kemangundi, and one other not very far from Santaveri. These three victims it was reported to have completely devoured and, most significant feature of all, after eating them it had spurned the carcases of the cattle it had killed.

The tiger had returned to Lakkavalli after that. Once again the scene was set for tragedy. A herd of cattle was being taken out to graze by two men, a middle-aged man and his son of fifteen years. They were standing together, watching their charges, when the boy saw the head of a large tiger observing them from behind a rise in the ground. He drew his father's attention to it. Both had turned to flee, leaving their animals to the tender mercies of the tiger, when that beast, instead of attacking the cattle, had come after them.

The lad, being young and fleeter of foot, was running ahead when the father saw the tiger bound past him, overhaul the boy and pounce upon him. In heedless panic, the older man had swerved to the right and continued his headlong flight. When he reached the village he collapsed in a faint, and it was a long time before he could tell what had happened.

The villagers went to Venkatasubbarao's quarters to beg his assistance. My new friend, however, did not own a gun and so could not help them at that moment. He closely questioned the father and got from him all the details, just as he related them to me.

A runner was dispatched to Tarikere, some eleven miles away, for help. Meanwhile the herd of cattle came rushing back to the village. It was intact. Not one of them had been harmed.

The next morning a mixed posse of policemen and forest guards, nine in number and armed with lathis, arrived together with two constables with rifles and a police sub-inspector carrying a revolver. Thus a dozen men, led by the father, went to the spot where the tiger had attacked. The body of the boy was not to be seen and everybody returned.

Thereafter the problem of obtaining labour for working on the dam became insurmountable. Those who lived in huts in the village refused to go out, while many went back to Tarikere. Others—and quite a large number of them—had made a practice of cycling every morning the eleven miles from Tarikere to work at the dam, returning the same distance in the evening. These refused to undertake the journey any more. And those people who brought supplies of rice, grain, bread and vegetables from Tarikere to the technical staff

working on the dam declined to travel on that dreadful road. So not only had work on the dam practically ceased, but the senior staff stationed at Lakkavalli were being starved out.

My new acquaintance had taken advantage of the inactivity to come to Bangalore on short leave, where we had met at the stamp vendor's counter. He earnestly begged me to return with him to Lakkavalli to try to rid the village of the menace that had beset it.

I had work to attend to, but yielded to my companion's pressing request and said I would come for five or six days only. I could not possibly stay longer.

Venkat, by which name I shall refer to him hereafter, was very pleased. I do not think he realized that it is practically impossible to locate a man-eater in five days. It was arranged that he should return to the hotel he was occupying, gather the bedding and the few other things he had brought with him, and be at my house by 3 p.m. the same day. We would then travel in my car to Lakkavalli.

I hastened home to gather my own equipment, which is always kept ready along with some tinned provisions, when I had another surprise. The postman brought a short letter from Dick Bird.

Dear Jock,

Hurry up and come. Be here by tomorrow. That tiger I told you about has turned man-eater and swallowed quite a few cattle-men. Yesterday, it carried off my postman while he was taking the mail bag from here to Hosoor village, three mils away. I had no time to ask for leave, so reported sick and looked for the remains of the postman to sit up over them. We searched all day and only found the poor chap's cap and slippers.

And, of course, the mail bag. (Couldn't the bloody tiger have eaten that!)

Time's up and I have to return to duty tomorrow. Now, no excuses man; I'm keeping lunch for you the day after tomorrow (that is, the day after you receive this letter), provided the tiger doesn't eat the reserve postman who carries the mail today with this letter. Poor beggar, he's in a blue funk and I can't blame him.

Your pal, Dick

Dick was surprised when he had two guests for dinner that very night. Venkat and I had made the trip in record time.

We chatted till a late hour, but this did not get us anywhere. I remembered that, beginning the following morning, I had exactly five

days in which to locate the man-eater and shoot it. Dick Bird could not leave his post. Venkat, with all the willingness he evinced, knew nothing about shooting and had no weapon anyway. There was no trace of the postman's body and it was not worth searching for it, as only bones would be left.

Venkat said that he had to be back at the dam by the following noon, so we decided to motor to his place that very night. By road, it was about fifty miles away, although much nearer as the crow flies. We downed a final rum and said goodbye to Dick well after midnight. I instructed Venkat how to operate the spotlight which with the headlights of the car enabled us to search the jungle as we drove along.

We were still about fifteen miles from Tarikere, at a place named Bagavadkatte, where a stream passes under the road by a small bridge with low parapets. Dark palms thickly fringed the road both to right and left of us, with heavy undergrowth and tiger-grass growing beneath the palms. It was there that we came upon a marvellous spectacle. Standing to one side, just beyond the parapet and evidently about to cross the road was a magnificent tiger!

It turned its head towards the car as the beams from the headlights, as well as the spotlight, caught it, and the reflection from its great orbs was brilliantly white-red, like two great stars shining by the wayside. By 'white-red' I mean more of white with a tinge of red. This is how I differentiate a tiger's eyes at night from those of a panther, which are smaller, closer together, and red-white in colour—that is, more of red and less of white.

We could see the tiger's striped coat, indeed its whole form, clearly in our bright lights.

I stopped the car. Both tigers and panthers, when a bright light falls upon them, often try to take cover by sinking to the ground, although they continue to stare back at the light, thus giving themselves away. This is just what our tiger did. It sank low and then started crawling forwards on its belly, seeking to hide behind the parapet of the bridge.

Venkat was beside himself with excitement. He trembled violently and the spotlight wavered. 'Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!' he hissed, louder and louder.

The tiger heard him. It scrambled forward the few remaining feet till the parapet hid it. Then it leapt down into the stream, passed under the bridge, and we heard it growl as it disappeared to our left in the long grass and undergrowth beneath the border of date palms. I could almost see tears in Venkat's eyes as he looked at me reproachfully. His lips trembled. For a moment I thought he was going to cry.

I explained to him at some length that all tigers are not man-eaters, that we were outside the man-eater's 'limit of beat' at the moment, and that Bagavadkatte was, and had always been, a well-known spot where tigers crossed the road, or passed under the bridge, from the low range of hillocks on the one side to the low range of hillocks on the other, and that the animal we had seen was undoubtedly a perfectly harmless-to-humans, innocent beast. Moreover, it was against rules to shoot tigers on the roadside with the aid of a spotlight, and unsporting besides.

I am not at all sure to this day whether Venkat was convinced by my arguments or considered me a fool. He certainly maintained an embarrassing silence till we reached our destination, his bungalow at about 2 a.m. There he brightened up a bit.

This happened when the watchman of the place informed him that the man-eater had carried away one of the few remaining coolies working on the dam when the man was returning to the village from work shortly after 5 p.m. the previous evening. As a result the coolies had told the watchman to inform his master when he returned that they would not come to work next day. Even if my arguments at the bridge at Bagavadkatte had not excused me in Venkat's eyes for not shooting the tiger we had seen there, he now had to be convinced that the animal that had crossed the road there could not have been the man-eater.

Venkat offered me food, but I declined and said we should snatch some sleep till five o'clock in order to be ready to start our operations at 6 a.m. He thereupon conducted me to a little room with a comfortable bed, and in five minutes I was asleep.

Dawn had broken when we set forth, together with the watchman and three *coolies,* for the place where the tiger had claimed its latest prey. It appeared that these same three coolies had been with the victim when the tiger had taken him. The four men had been walking along the high bund—or wall— of the dam which was still under the process of construction. They had reached the end of it and were descending the steep slope where the sluice-gate was to be built, with the intention of climbing up the other side, when the man-eater struck. There was a piercing scream, and on looking around the fourth man was not to be seen by his mates.

A moment later they caught sight of him, held securely by the throat in the jaws of a tiger which bounded up the slope they had just come down. The beast crossed the top of the bund and disappeared from view. They delayed not a moment, but fled to report the news at the village. Next they went to the engineer's bungalow. Nobody had attempted a rescue of any kind.

We searched the cutting which was to form the sluice-gate, and

there the tragedy of the evening before, in all its gruesome details, was made clear to us. The man-eater had not been lying in wait in the cuttings, as we had surmised. It had, in fact, been some distance away when it had seen the men and had deliberately followed them. The soft earth showed pug-marks where the tiger had clambered up the bund, bounded along the top, and then sprung upon the man who had been the last in line as he was descending the slope of the cutting.

The poor fellow had probably died soon after emitting his loud scream. There were no blood marks at the spot where he had been attacked, indicating the tiger had not delayed in picking up its victim and making off with him.

We found the pug-marks left by the killer as it was making off after crossing the top of the bund. Halfway down the steep slope it had skidded, and the piled-up earth showed the deep furrows left by its four feet when it had dug them into the ground to stop its slide. At this juncture it must have released his hold upon the dead man's throat, for when the tiger picked him up again, it left a trail of blood all the way down the rest of the incline and into the jungle beyond.

But for the blood trail it would have been impossible for us to follow the spoor, for the undergrowth, due to recent rain, was dense. But the vivid green of the carpet of weeds constrasted sharply with the bright red of the blood-drops which showed up clearly before us for some distance ahead.

The tiger had carried its victim westwards, and for a long distance. It had crossed the main road at a sharp curve about half a mile beyond Lakkavalli village and before the road had begun to circle back towards Umblebyle and Bhadravati. The animal was obviously making for the Laulbagh Forest Block, and I began to suspect that it must be living in some cave in this area.

A few minutes later we crossed the Forest department's 'fire-line' and were now officially inside the Laulbagh Forest Block. Our quarry had not stopped tor a moment, and it was becoming difficult to follow its trail. The blood in the body of its victim had coagulated and ceased to flow, so that the drops that had fallen were scarce and small. Our progress was consequently slow through having to search for them at long intervals, and I feared that very soon the trail would die out.

That was exactly what happened ten or fifteen minutes later. No further blood-drops could we find, nor was it possible to see the pug-marks of the man-eater. Twelve hours had elapsed since it had passed that way, and the freshening effect of the night breezes, together with the dew that had fallen, had again raised the bent stems of weeds, grass and undergrowth that had been trodden upon or brushed aside by the tiger and the body of its victim in passing. With stems and leaves standing stiffly erect, the weeds and undergrowth effectively

hid from us any indication whatever as to the direction which the tiger and the victim had taken. The trail was dead.

Venkat and my other companions were bitterly disappointed. So was I. However, one piece of information had been gained from our work that morning. It was clear that the tiger lived in some cave or haunt within the Laulbagh area, as I had suspected from the beginning, and considering the distance it had already brought its victim, his hide-out could not be very far from the place where the trail had died out. I made inquiries as to the existence of a cave, but none of the villagers appeared to know about one.

As soon as we got back to the village I asked for the local forest guard. He would know the topography of the jungle within its jurisdiction. To my chagrin I was told that the guard had gone to departmental headquarters at Tarikere and would return only in the morning.

No time was to be lost, so I bundled Venkat into the car beside me and made for Tarikere without further delay. The bee that had got into my bonnet regarding the existence of a cave or other hiding place would have to be swatted before I was satisfied.

In half an hour we were at the district Forest Office, where we found not only the guard we were seeking but also his immediate superior, the forest ranger, and the divisional chief, the district officer, as well. With these people around us we related how we had followed and lost the trail of the man-eater in the Laulbagh jungle. Could they tell us if there was a cave or any other place of hiding in this block in which the tiger could have made its home?

The D.F.O. looked at the ranger, and the ranger at his guard. Then the guard looked back again, and so back and forth.

'There does not appear to be any cave in the area, Mr. Anderson,' the D.F.O announced at length.

The bee that had flown into my bonnet was dying an ignoble death. My theory was shattered! The guard, standing on one bare foot, scratched his shin with the toe of the other.

'I don't suppose the devil could be sheltering in the old Munneswara Temple, could he, *swami?'* he asked shamefacedly, addressing his immediate superior, the ranger.

'The Munneswara Temple!' ejaculated the ranger, thoughtfully; 'the Munneswara Temple!'

'The Munneswara Temple!' the D.F.O. exploded exultantly. Then, to the guard who was hanging his head in disgrace, 'You fool! Why didn't you say that before? That's it! That's where he is! The old Munneswara Temple!' The D.F.O. pranced about in the his excitement.

When emotions had died down I was informed that an ancient temple, almost in ruins, stood a short distance within the border of the

Laulbagh Block. From the directions given by the guard, we must have been very near it when we had lost the trail that morning. The inner room, or sanctuary of the temple, was said to have partly caved in, but sufficient room was left for the tiger to live in, the guard thought.

Back we went to Lakkavalli, the D.F.O., the ranger and the guard following in government jeep. They said they wanted to be in at 'the kill', although they promised me they would remain in the village and not hamper me while the actual killing was taking place.

It was now past lunch-time, but with expectation at fever heat I decided to forgo the meal and set out with the forest guard on foot for the ruins of the old temple. We passed the spot where we had lost the blood trail and had gone another mile or more when there was a sudden dip in the ground. The centre of this little bowl or depression was an island of tangled undergrowth and bushes, and peeping through the varied foliage I could see the grey ruins of a small temple.

Instructing my companion to climb one of the taller trees and remain at the top, a suggestion that he did not delay a moment in executing, I picked my way on tiptoe towards the ruins, taking advantage of every intervening bush to cover my advance. The hot sun poured down on the scene and I was in no hurry.

In my excitement I discovered I had forgotten to ask the guard the direction the temple faced. This was important, if I hoped to take the man-eater by surprise. It would never do for me to be watching the rear of the temple while the tiger slipped out in front, circled around under cover of the undergrowth and attacked me from behind.

Eventually, on closer approach, I could make out the opening that led to the temple-sanctuary. It faced a little to my right and was partially blocked by debris. I was lucky. All I had to do now was creep up beside this opening, take cover, draw the man-eater out, and shoot it.

This is what I proceeded to do. Edging forwards, I reached the corner of the square that formed the outside of the temple. This struck me as being a very suitable place in which to hide and ambush my quarry. I would be safe from attack when the tiger rushed out. Naturally, it would charge straightforward and not think of looking for me to its right or left.

But there was a snag. If I hid behind one corner of the building, what was to prevent the tiger hiding behind the other corner at the back of me and pouncing upon me from the rear? It might not be in the temple at that moment, for all I knew. Perhaps it was watching me from the cover of some bush while It was searching for it.

I decided to creep up to within a couple of feet of the temple entrance and flatten myself against the wall. At least that would prevent me from being attacked from behind while I was peeping

around the corner in front. This I did and was in position at last. Now it was a matter of drawing the tiger out. I had to avoid frightening it, and I should not anger it. It had to do itself out of curiosity.

So I moaned faintly, imitating the call of a tiger far away. Nothing happened! Perhaps the tiger had not heard me, although I could scarcely credit that. I moaned again, and still nothing happened. I moaned a third time, and much louder. That distant tiger had made a remarkably fast approach! Yet nothing transpired and I concluded that the tiger was not in the temple. I peeped around the corner very carefully; then I grew bolder and entered the broken opening, stooping double. A damp, mouldering smell greeted me. The dust at the entrance showed no pug-marks. Nor was there any trace of human remains. Not only was no tiger here, but no tiger had been here for months. Clearly the Munneswara Temple was not the man-eater's hiding place.

We were so disappointed that the huge lunch my friend Venkat had had prepared for himself and me was sufficient to feed the D.F.O. and the ranger also. Moreover, a little was left over, sufficient to give the forest guard a snack.

Sitting on the plinth of the veranda of Venkat's bungalow smoking, a short while later, I chafed at the delay while my friends continued to talk over events. Time meant everything to me, but nothing to them. It is the one thing in India that has never been rationed; and never will be.

In the afternoon sunlight, a Lambadi herdsman grazed his buffaloes outside. With the man-eater about, it was far too dangerous for him to take them into the forest, while the sparse grass in the compound of the engineer's quarters offered a meagre substitute. Attracted by the sight and smell of the assorted fumes from my pipe, Venkat's cigar and the cigarettes smoked by our two friends of the Forest department, this individual became sufficiently emboldened to approach us and beg for a cigarette. The D.F.O., threw him one and we forgot his existence, after seeing him move off to the rear of the bungalow where we heard him and the forest guard talking to each other.

A few minutes later the guard approached. He was excited, but also hesitated to interrupt the conversation of his exalted superiors.

'Well?' muttered the guard with great diffidence. 'I prey your honour not to get angry, but the outcaste Lambadi tells me there is an overhanging ridge of rock a mile beyond the Munneswara Temple under which there is sufficient space for a tiger to shelter. In fact, he says he saw one sunning itself on top of the rock one evening when he was returning with his buffaloes, and before the man-eater came amongst us. Of course, he ran away and his animals followed. He says

he had not been there again.'

We summoned the Lambadi without delay and closely questioned him. His reply was exactly what the forest guard had just told us. The only new piece of information he offered was that he felt certain that the tiger he had seen and the man-eater were one and the same animal, bearing in mind the fact that the tiger had not turned man-eater at that time. Within a few minutes I was on my way again, the forest guard accompanying me rather reluctantly this time. But the Lambadi was in better spirits.

It was half-past four when we passed the temple, and close upon five before the Lambadi pointed out to me, about two hundred yards ahead, a slight rise in the ground above which peeped a sloping rock. He told me that, although we could not see it from where we stood, owing to the intervening jungle, when I came close enough I would find that the rock made a low overhanging cave, the entrance to which was not more than two feet in height. This, he thought, had been caused by the rush of rainwater during the monsoons, for the cave was not a very deep one. On his previous visit he had been at almost the same spot on which we were now standing and had noticed the tiger lying at full length and sunning itself on the top of the rock. He had run away as fast as he could.

Once again I told my companions to climb trees and to remain there till my return, and for the second time that day I crept forward on tiptoe as cautiously as possible.

This time my advance lay through fairly thick jungle, and not through open country like that which formed the depression in which the old Munneswara Temple mouldered. I looked to right and left and behind, to guard against flank and rear attacks. There was an oppresive silence and I glanced momentarily downwards at each pace that I made. On no account must I step on a leaf that might rustle or a twig that might crackle. Now and then, despite all my precautions, some part of my body brushed against a bush and made a faint rubbing sound.

I said to myself: 'I must not do that again: the tiger will hear me.'

I was now very near the rock, but the undergrowth in front still hid the ground level opening mentioned by the Lambadi. I halted for a few minutes. Maybe I could hear the tiger if I strained my ears. I did so, but I heard absolutely nothing.

'A few steps more,' I said to myself, 'and I will be able to see.'

I looked down. No leaf, or twig, no loose stone in front. It was safe for me to take another step forwards.

I took that step, but I overlooked an insignificant little shrub to my right. That shrub had thorns, and the thorns did the trick. They rasped audibly against my trousers, held for a moment, and then let

go with another rasp.

Before I could guess whether the man-eater had heard me, it had in fact done so. Instinct warned it that this was no bird, no hare or other small creature that was approaching just out of sight. It knew full well that no living thing that could fly, walk or creep would dare to come so close to its dreadful presence. Therefore this must be an enemy, and more over, an enemy that was stalking it, the tiger, no doubt to kill it in turn.

Its reflexes gave it this message and there was no delay. The tiger charged, its shattering roars of 'Wroof! Wroof! Wroof!' rending the silence.

The bushes before me parted and its head and body catapulted through them before it caught sight of me. It halted for a moment prior to making the final spring. Perhaps it never expected to find a miserable human being confronting it instead of running away. Head and paws at ground level, hindquarters and tail sticking up, the tiger looked a bit ridiculous.

I fired twice into its head. Then I leaped quickly aside, for one must never forget to spring aside after firing at a tiger at close quarters, as the odds are ninety-nine to one that it will rush straightforward, even if it must die the next instant. A dying tiger can in fact do you an awful lot of harm.

The man-eater did as I expected, and I shot it twice more behind the shoulder. As it twitched and then began to stiffen, I saw that it was quite an old animal, past the age from hunting game.

The bones of the coolie for whose body we had been searching were strewn about the entrance to the shallow cave. They had been gnawed clean. Red ants were devouring what small strands of flesh adhered to them still.

The three of us returned in darkness, unafraid this time. There was another feast at the bungalow, and it gave me indigestion. Dreams of tigers rushing out of temples troubled me till the early hours. Then came a farewell to Venkat and my friends of the Forest department.

I was at Santaveri by nine in the morning. Dick offered me lunch, but I declined. My stomach was still rumbling in uncomfortable protest as I swallowed a quick rum. By four I was home, having accomplished my mission well within time.

Eight

What the Thunderstorm Brought

Donald, my son, was immensely pleased with himself. he had just tied for the first place in a clay-pigeon shooting competition held by the Rifle Association of Mysore state.

Now clay-pigeon shooting is something we in India do not normally indulge in, at least so far as I know, perhaps because there are so many wild pigeons that we cannot be bothered with the clay variety, or whatever substance it is that goes to make a clay pigeon. More likely, because up to this time nobody had the apparatus to eject these little things, these clay pigeons into the air. Certainly, I had never seen them before. I am sure I could not hit one myself. I am essentially a rifle shot and almost useless with a gun. My attempts years ago at snipe and duck convinced me of that.

Donald, however, is a natural good shot with both gun and rifle. Like me, he had never seen a clay-pigeon-shooting gadget, and therefore certainly had had no chance to practise. But he entered tor the competition and tied tor the first prize. And now he suggested that we should make a trip to the jungles to celebrate the occasion.

To the jungles? What a strange place to go to celebrate! But the truth is we both love the jungles. In them we are at home; there we find peace. So it did not take much persuasion to get me to go.

This time we decided to try our hand at photographing tigers by night rather than shooting them. Donald had borrowed a wonderful camera with a flashlight apparatus from his old friend of schoolboy days, young Dudhwala, who was young no longer, and about whom I have told a tale in an earlier book.* For a long time Don had been wanting to try his hand at the most difficult and I might also add, most highly-skilled sport of night-photography and this was his chance.

I will not tell you to which jungle we went because it is one of the very few places remaining in southern India where tigers are yet to be found. Some enthusiasts have read my books and gone to places I have named, bent upon trying their luck, and it has become a matter of necessity, from the point of view of Indian conservation, no longer to name them. For tigers, panthers and bear are becoming very scarce in southern India. The heavy shooting which resulted from the influx of foreigners into India during World War II began their decimation. The Indian poacher particularly, of the kind that uses jeeps with spotlights, continued the process. Then came the deadly insecticide of

which I have already spoken, which the government still supplies almost free of charge to protect the villagers' crops against various pests, but ryots whose cattle or goats have been killed by tigers and panthers have no compunction about smearing the flesh of their slain animals with this stuff. Almost always, success crowns this dastardly deed by poisoning the marauder when he returns for a second meal.

The results have been so disastrous that, particularly in Mysore state, tigers, panthers, hyenas, and even jackals, and to some extent vultures, have been practically wiped out by the misuse of this chemical—without taking into account the high mortality among human beings all over the country by suicide, murder and accidental poisoning. The old-fashioned and far slower acting, less deadly posions like arsenic, strychnine and zinc salts, which can only be purchased in minute quantities, are discoverable, but the government will give anyone pounds of deadly insecticide almost for the asking. It is deplorable that the authorities cannot, do not, or will not see the truth of this matter.

So we went to 'tiger-land', to a lovely cabin of bamboo and grass that we had built on a small plot of land I had bought many years earlier for the sum of 120 rupees (about seven pounds sterling). Two hundred yards in front of our hut flowed a river, its presence plainly indicated by the heavy growth of giant *muthee,* tamarind, *jumlum* and wild mango trees that lined both banks. Here and there were areas where dense clumps of bamboo had ousted all other forms of vegetation, bringing their towering, feathery fronds to overhang the cascades and pools of the stream, while dark and silent glades, covered with a carpet of rotting leaves, reached down to the water's edge.

The crocodile loves such places, for the deer like them too. The dense cover afforded by the bamboos, their shade, and the flooring of decaying leaves permit a silent, sheltered and comparatively safe approach for the sambar, nilgai and spotted deer when they come in the heat of the day, and also at night, to slake their thirst with the cool water that has cascaded down so recently from the cold of the mountains above the forest.

In their anxiety to escape the great carnivores that may be lurking behind any tree, any clump of bamboo, or any bush, the deer lose no time in drinking as fast as they can, with their noses and ears alert for the scent or sound of a tiger, and their eyes on the watch for a panther or for the cruel wild dogs. Often enough, in the anxiety of scanning the landscape, they overlook the ugly crocodile, who is invisible anyhow, his head and body below the surface of the stream and very close to the bank.

And so a sambar lowers its head to drink, and as it does so the

crocodile rises from the water. Cruel jaws, with long, saw-like teeth, close upon the sambar's snout while almost in the same instant the reptile's flat, scaly tail swings out of the water and whips across with irresistible force, striking the sambar's legs or flank and throwing it off-blance into the pool.

Never loosening its grip on the sambar's face, the crocodile swims backwards into deep water, dragging its struggling victim with it. Once in its element, the crocodile throws itself into a spin of incredible speed in order to break its victim's neck or otherwise render it unconscious, and the next moment both crocodile and sambar vanish beneath the dark surface of the pool and only a series of large bubbles disturb the placid flow of water over the scene of the tragedy.

But we know nothing of the grim drama being enacted in the slime and ooze at the bottom of the jungle river. From the comfortable cane chairs on the veranda of our hut we listen to the loud cracking of the stems of giant bamboos as they are broken by a herd of elephants grazing on the opposite bank of the stream. Now and again comes the faint squeak of an elephant-calf and the dull thunder-like rumble from the digestive organs of an adult, or a contented cow-like mooing from a feeding female. All is peaceful and the faraway call of a peafowl alternates with the shrill, cat-like meowing cries that come from above us, made by the pair of brown vultures in their never-ending quest for scraps of food left by the great jungle cats.

Although there was apparent peace in the jungle there was some discord in our hut. Trouble arose between the caretaker, whom we employ to look after the place in our absence, and his wife, who brings us water twice a day in an old kerosene tin from the river. There was muttering and grumbling, and an occasional high-pitched female screech that put even the vultures to shame.

'Some trouble between Boora and his wife,' observed Donald laconically. 'Better see what it is about. She hasn't brought water for my bath yet, although I've told her twice already.'

So I got up and went into the kitchen, which is a smaller grass hut about twelve feet square, situated behind our dwelling-place. There sat Boora on the ground, idly poking a wood fire with a stick while his spouse sat opposite him, chewing betel-nut vigorously and spitting red saliva all over the place. An interested spectator was my *shikari* Thangavelu, originally from faraway Closepet, who had promoted himself into Don's services as a camp-cook, table-boy, dressing-boy, and every other sort of boy except a boy who honestly did any work.

'What's the matter with you two?' I asked aggressively, glaring at Boora and his wife alternately. Then, addressing the woman. 'Your bad language is disgusting.'

There was silence for a while, then Boora explained in the local dialect: 'Sir, I married this harridan three years ago. She has had three children from me but doesn't look after them. Neither does she feed me properly. She won't work because she's lazy, All day long she keeps chewing betel-nut and demands money to buy more. Altogether, she's too expensive a proposition.

'As it stands when I married her I paid ten rupees to her father for her. Now, old Javanna had offered me his youngest daughter for fifteen rupees. She's a comely wench and will look after me well. What's more, Javanna is willing to take over this bag-of-bones from me for five rupees, half the price I paid for her, so that the deal will only cost me ten. She can keep the three children she had from me—I certainly don't want'em!'

Further plans on the part of Boora were interrupted by the screeching voice of Devi, his wife.

'You lecherous old pig!' she cried. 'What do you want with a young girl like Lakshmi? She's only fifteen years old, although she's a bitch at that! You're already half-dead, and after a week with her I'll have the trouble of burying your exhausted bones! As for that old sod, javanna! He's so old he hasn't any teeth! Also, he's fond of young boys! Who's going to satisfy me? I'm young and vigorous still!'

A knotty problem, indeed! But there was one redemptive factor. Considering the rate of exchange at one shilling and four pence to a rupee, the cost-factor involved in this mutual exchange, in whatever way you might look at it, was not very high. Thangavelu summed up the situation concisely with a wide grin, and in the butler-English which he had picked up, chimed in:

'Sar I like this place. Plenty very much damn good place. Plenty shikar, plenty tiger, plenty deer got-it. Plenty women, too, plenty damn cheap-rate. Here five rupees, ten rupees get-it wife. Then too, can pay next month. When no want, can change-it. Another wife get-it. Only ten rupees! Damn woman won't go 'way after. Want-it more money. Can't get 'nuther wife less than 'nuther hundred rupees. Sar, this very damn good place.'

Thangavelu ended with a meaning grin.

'Thangavelu, tell that bloody woman to fetch my bathwater,' Donald roared from the veranda. Kunmarie, the local *shikari* , turned up just then with the information we had asked him to bring us. He had been scouring the jungle since dawn and reported that a tiger as well as a panther, had walked up the bed of a dry *nullah* about half a mile away. The panther seemed an old resident as Kunmarie said his tracks, both old and fresh, appeared many times. The tiger was evidently on a casual walk and could not be expected to return that way for some time.

So the prospects were that if we tied a bait with the object of taking a photograph later, it would probably be a panther and not a tiger that would kill it. We were after tiger only; we reiterated this fact to Kunmarie, asking him to go out again to try to find a place frequented by a tiger rather than a panther.

That afternoon he returned with news of success. Across the river, he said, was a well-frequented game trail on which were tiger-pugs, both old and fresh. Further, there was a convenient tree, safe from interference by elephants, from which we could easily take our photographs when the time came. The tiger was sure to pass the same way that night or the next.

We had procured four buffaloes as bait and decided to tie out two of them—the larger on the tiger-frequented game-trail across the river, and the smaller in the *nullah* four furlongs away, where the panther was almost certain to get it. Thangavelu went with Kunmarie to help tether the two animals, while Don and I went for an evening walk along the river bank.

This particular jungle was still a veritable paradise for game and we saw large herds of spotted deer, with a fair number of sambar and individual nilgai, browsing by the

water-side. Around a curve in the river we came upon a bull-elephant having his evening drink. As we were not on a *shikar* trip we carried no firearms. For a moment or two the bull looked nasty; no doubt he resented our intrusion on his privacy. Then he thought better of it, wheeled and lumbered away into the thicket of overhanging trees. It was extraordinary how so large an animal could move so quietly.

The following morning Kunmarie went to the game-trail and Thangavelu to the *nullah,* to see what had happened to our baits during the night. In the jungle the unexpected frequently happens, and the reports they brought us were as surprising as they were heartening from the photographic point of view. A tiger, and not a panther, had come along the *nullah* where we had tied the smaller bait, expecting the panther to kill it. It had easily broken the tethering-rope and had taken the buffalo-calf a little distance away to a ditch. There it had eaten every scrap except the head and four hooves. Because they were sheltered by undergrowth the vultures had not discovered the remains.

Strangely enough a panther, and not the tiger we had expected, had come along the game-trail across the river. It in turn had killed the large buffalo-calf we had tied for the tiger, evidently with some difficulty, for Kunmarie reported marks of a struggle. But the panther had not been strong enough to sever the tethering-rope. So it had eaten a small portion of the buffalo-calf, leaving the rest by the side of

the game-trail where we should be able to photograph it easily if we wished, from the big tree bordering the trail when it returned that night.

Don was in high spirits. He would photograph his tiger at last. Naturally he decided to sit over the scant remains, consisting of the head and legs, of the smaller calf we had tied out in the *nullah.* To make sure the tiger put in an

appearance, he proposed tying our third bait near by, just in case the tiger thought the remains of the first one too insignificant to merit a second visit.

Incidentally, I might remark that this is a plan I have found most successful with both tiger and panther. After all, they are individuals just as we are; they differ among themselves just as we differ and they suffer from some at least of our faults. The commonest of these is greed. Some panthers and tigers hardly ever return to their kills a second time. Others return only after they have spent a very long time reconnoitering the locality and feel it safe to show themselves. It is in this process of surveyance that they frequently discover the presence of the hunter, perched in his *tree-machan* or wherever he may have concealed himself. To exploit this greed, I have found it good to tie another live bait within sight of the partially eaten one, and if possible to sit at a spot between them; or if that is not practical, to sit over the new bait in preference to the old, partly-eaten one.

What happens is this. The tiger or panther returns to the scene of its first kill but does not approach the carcase straight away. It is suspicious and circles the spot several times to discover the presence of the man its instinct warns is in hiding somewhere. During this manoeuvre it comes upon the new live bait. One might conjecture that this would make the feline more suspicious than ever. How does a live animal come to be so close to the place where he had left a dead and almost completely devoured victim? But you must remember that tigers and panthers cannot reason as human beings do. They are creatures of instinct, even if such instinct is often uncanny in its efficiency.

The immediate result is that the prowling tiger or panther kills the live animal. No doubt the prospect of fresh meat is always more enticing than the decomposing flesh that has been exposed to the sun and vultures throughout the day, and so the tiger or panther brings about its own undoing.

I had no camera suitable for night photography, and as we were not on a shooting excursion and carried no firearms there seemed no point in my sitting on the big tree across the river merely to hear a panther tucking into a good meal. So I decided to spend the first part of the night in sitting in the comfort of a cane chair on the veranda of

our bamboo hut, listening to the sounds of the jungle; and the rest of it in bed.

Showers of rain had been sporadic in the area, and for this reason each of us had brought along a tarpaulin sheet to sling as a roof over the *machan* in case of necessity. This is a practice I do not recommend at all. Firstly, it makes the *machan* very conspicuous and calls for extra camouflaging. Secondly, when the rain comes the noise of the water on the roof is so great that your cannot hear a thing. Worse still, any creature on the ground below at fifty yards cannot help but hear the pandemonium overhead. It looks up, discovers the *machan* and knows you are there. But it certainly is no joke to sit up in a tree all night in pouring rain, even if you are waring a greatcoat or waterproof cape. The rain has a strange knack of getting inside anything.

Don decided to use the tarpaulin and I went along with Kunmarie and Thangavelu, together with another man named Bunda, to help him with his *machan.*

A soap-nut tree grew to one side of the *nullah* and on this Don decided to sit. It was within about thirty yards of the ditch in which lay the head and legs of our first bait and it overlooked the course of the *nullah* in both directions. There was a third advantage to this tree. The tiger, in stalking our bait the night before, had come down by way of a third *nullah,* which was more a shallow ditch, and the soap-nut tree grew just opposite the point where this ditch met the main *nullah.* So it was strategically in an excellent position and, according to all the rules of the game, with ordinary luck the tiger should make itself visible somewhere, and Don should get the chance of a good photograph.

Our three henchmen made an excellent job of the *machan,* and as the sky was clouding over Don decided to stretch the tarpaulin above the platform of the *machan* , across a stick cut and placed in position so as to afford a slope on both sides to allow any water to flow off. The tarpaulin itself was cunningly concealed with leaves and branches that entirely hid it from view. The four of us went away about 5 p.m. leaving Don with the camera all set for an adventurous night.

I will tell you first what I heard from our bamboo cabin, and then let Don tell his part of the tale.

Thangavelu served dinner early, and then I sat on the cane chair on the veranda, smoking my pipe and sipping rum and lime-juice. Darkness had only just fallen and the jungle was silent for the moment. The 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!' came the cry of spotted deer from across the river while a sambar stag on the near bank hoarsely took up the warning with his strident 'Dhank! Dhank! Oo-onk!' and a doe sambar, farther away, heard the signal of danger and in a higher tone

not quite so hoarse, answered 'Wonk! Wonk! Wonk!'

A bribe of langur monkeys on a banyan tree, the top of which was just visible to me in the darkness to my right, had all gone to sleep long ago. All except the watchman who, with a true sense of responsibility, had remained wide awake. Later, when he began to feel drowsy, he would awaken his relief, who would keep watch till the time came to awaken the next big male, and so on, throughout the night and all day long too, for the big male langurs have an uncanny sense of disicipline and responsibility. They take upon themselves.

each in turn, the duties of a watchman, perched at the very top of the highest tree, to look for possible danger and guard the females and young from an unexpected attack.

The langur watchman heard the sambar and the spotted deer and echoed the alarm to awaken the members of his tribe: 'Harr! Ha-harr! Harr! Ha-harri!' I could picture the mother-langurs clutching their young to their breasts while peering down from their perches on the banyan tree into the blackness of the night below to try to discover the killer and reckon from where it might be creeping upon them.

I could plot the progress of the tiger's approach by the cries of the spotted deer and the sambar. He crossed the river and frightened a barking deer in the act of drinking. 'Khrr! Khrr!' the little animal cried. Its cry is quite unlike any other noise associated with the deer species. It sounds more like the hoarse bark of a dog and accounts for the colloquial name by which this small creature, otherwise called the muntjac is known.

The tiger was now disdainful. It knew it had been discovered and scorned to conceal its movements any longer. 'Oo-oongh!' it roared, and then modified its utterance to a softer but deeper 'Aungh! Ughh; Ughh-aa!' There was not anger in the sound, nor was it very hungry.

As if by magic, at the sound of its roars, deep silence descended upon the forest. The deer and monkeys were stilled. Even the frogs by the riverside stopped their croaking. All living creatures, large and small, knew that the king of the jungle was on the prowl and they trembled in fear. Only a solitary wood-circket, ensconced in cool comfort behind the water-pot in what goes for the bathroom of our bamboo-cabin, disdained the challenge of the striped terror. Maybe it had not even heard. Maybe it could not be bothered with such big clumsy creatures as tigers. Probably its problem was more mundane.

Then the silence was shattered down by the river: 'Haa-ah! Haa-ah! Haa-ah!'

The panther had returned long ago and had no doubt been eating its fill of our larger bait. All this fuss had upset it, while the roars of its bigger, irascible and bullying cousin, the tiger, had made it jittery and irritable. It resented the proximity of that majestic terror, but did not

know what to do about it. Angrily it repeated: 'Haa-ha! Haa-ah! Haa-ah!' while deciding whether to remain or slink away.

I knew that Don must have heard all these sounds too, and that he would be getting ready to take his picture of the tiger, which by this time should be near the remain of the buffalo calf it had killed the night before, and the live bait we had tied near by.

Silence fell over the forest again. The frogs resumed their croaking by the river and the night seemed to grow black and yet blacker. I looked up at the sky and wondered why I could see no stars. A moment later knew the answer as thunder rumbled across the range of hills behind our cabin. Repeated flashes followed, and the artillery of heaven was loosed upon us, each crash preceded by vivid forked lightning that snaked across the sky like rivers on a giant map.

Then the wind started. I could hear it howling in the distance as it raged down the hillside with a prolonged banshee wail rising ever louder and louder until it hit our own jungle. I could hear the trees tossing wildly as their branches clashed in agony, although it was far too dark to see a thing, and the bamboo supports of our cabin swayed, straining, creaking and groaning. I thought that the thatched roof would be blown away.

Then suddenly as quickly as it came, the wind passed. I could hear it receding into the distance across the forest tops as far as the distant horizon. But the lightning increased in intensity, and the crashes of thunder drew ever nearer and more intense. All at once a giant tree was struck. It was cleft asunder as a vivid flash lit the forest as bright as day, so close to our hut that the thunderclap was instantaneous. I thought of Don in his soap-nut tree and was worried. It was not a very big tree or a high one, however, and hardly likely to attract the lightning that had so many loftier trees to choose from.

The rain reached the cabin and for a moment even approaching down the hillside, long before it reached the cabin. Donald must be really glad, I thought, that he decided to put the tarpaulin roof above his *machan*.

The rain reached the cabin and for a moment even the thunder was drowned in the uproar of falling water. The grass roof above me hissed, and streams of water from a hundred leaks dripped, pattered and flowed in all directions upon our possessions. What had been, only a moment earlier, a cosy cabin became a wet and muddy hole with pools of water on the floor and no dry spot within sight. I sat on, inwardly cursing the labourers who had made such a poor job of the roof.

Thangavelu, awakened at last by the hubbub, in which perhaps he was dreaming of wives for sale by the dozen at five rupees a head, dashed in, gazing in dismay at all the wet things around him, and then

scuttled about aimlessly, trying hopelessly to find shelter for them.

The deluge continued for an hour and then settled down to a steady drizzle.

'Quak-ker! Quak-ker! Quak-ker! Quak-ker!' The frogs had now changed their note. This was the mating call of a thousand throats from the river and surrounding puddles, to salute the advent of the monsoon. I rose and prepared for sleep. The only dry spot seemed to be under the bamboo bed rather than upon it.

At that moment I heard the unmistakable scream of an enraged elephant. It came from the direction of the *nullah* and Don's *machan.* Thangavelu, who was still pottering about aimlessly, heard it too. He stopped and we looked at each other anxiously. Then we both went out on to the soaking veranda in order to hear better.

The elephant screamed again. There was no mistaking the fact that the scream came from the *nullah.* Then I heard distant shouting, muted by the continuous pattern of the rain, but there was no doubt that it was a human voice, shouting words I could not make out. The voice came from the same direction as the elephant's scream. Who but Donald was out there in the *nullah?*

Then the truth dawned upon me suddenly. My son was in danger: the elephant was trying to pull him out of the *machan* , and he was trying to drive it away. And he was unarmed.

The irony of the situation struck me and I cursed myself for my overconfident carelessness. I should have known better; they boy was not to blame. We were defenceless. For we had brought no firearms with us, leaving them behind because we had come on a photographic excursion and did not want to be tempted to shoot!

Grabbing the larger of the two lanterns in one hand and, for want of anything better, a walking-stick made from sandalwood in the other, I dashed out and began to stumble through the drenched jungle as fast as I could to cover the half-mile to the *nullah.* I was hardly aware of the cold or the fact that I was bareheaded and without a coat as the rain soaked me to the skin.

I had run as best I could for quite a distance before I became aware of another lantern bobbing behind me. It was Thangavelu, carrying the other light. He loved Donald, and I was grateful for his presence. No other servant would have dared to venture forth on that foul night, in pitch darkness and unarmed, to a place where a wild elephant was rampaging in fury.

Then we heard a tearing, rending sound, and a crash, and I knew the elephant had pushed over the tree on which Don had his *machan.* I tried to run faster and Thangavelu ran beside me. But I could not make the pace, so we resorted to shouting as we jog-trotted along, hoping to attract the elephant's attention and draw him away from

Donald.

This is how Donald himself tells his part of this story: 'I don't know why my father, when he writes his books, brings me into them. For one thing, I hate writing and talking about myself. Actually, the entire incident appears to me now as "much ado about nothing".

'Dad had told how it all started and how I came to be seated on the soap-nut tree with Dudhwalla's flashlight camera to try to photograph the tiger that had killed and devoured our bait the previous night. There was so little left that I had decided to tie a live one near by to tempt the tiger when he prowled around, as tigers generally do, before approaching their kills.

'The *machan* was a comfortable one; the head and feet of the first calf lay in a ditch some thirty yards to my left, while below me was the *nullah* that Kunmarie, our *shikari,* said was a regular route for tigers and panthers on their way to the river. Entering it was a smaller watercourse which the tiger used the night before. A shade to my right, and in clear view, was our third bait—a live one—another buffalo-calf. The second bait was killed by a panther across the river the night before.

'Darkness had just fallen when the deer and langur monkeys sounded their alarm cries and I knew that a tiger or a panther was afoot—probably a tiger, to judge by the amount of noise the animals were making. Then the tiger roared fairly near, and soon afterwards I could hear a panther answering in the distance. Most likely it was the one that killed our second bait.

'I got ready to take my picture. All the same, I wished I had a rifle in my hands instead of a camera. The old man is always talking about taking photographs instead of shooting, and I guess he is right, but the temptation was there nevertheless. I felt strongly now and wished I had my .423 with me.

'The next sound I heard was a thud and the cry of the live bait. I knew it was a tiger and not a panther that was killing the calf, for a panther has to choke his victim, who naturally struggles. There was no sound of a struggle whatever, for the calf was already dead with a broken neck.

'I pointed the camera downwards and to my right, in the general direction of the live bait, and pressed the switch-button. There was a blinding flash and the tiger uttered a startled 'Gr-a-ahm!' This was followed by the faint crash of undergrowth. I knew that it had gone.

'There was nothing more for me to do and I stretched out to sleep, contented with the hope of a good photograph. The *machan* was a bit hard and I wished I was back in our bamboo cabin.

'I must have fallen asleep after that, for I woke with a start to find my *machan* swaying crazily as the tree bent and threshed in a

mighty wind. The night was extraordinarily dark till a flash of lightning, followed almost at once by a crash of thunder, told me we were in for a storm, and a big one too. Branches and leaves were torn from the trees and they whipped past my face, while my tarpaulin roof was partly blown away. One end held, the corner that we had lashed to the tree-trunk, while the other threshed loudly in the wind, whipping against the branches and making a great noise.

Then all at once the wind fell and the rain came. It was more like a waterfall than rain. I closed Dudhwalla's camera and flashlight apparatus and put them away in their case and hoped the water would not get through. I was like a sponge myself; so full of water that it seemed to be running through me. And the rain went on falling.

'Now something unusual occurred. The tiger came back. Probably the lightning had made it think himself a fool for running away in the first instance. What it had seen must have been only a flash of lightning, no more. So it came back and started tearing at the calf it had killed a short time before.

'I dared not attempt to take another picture. God knows what would happen to Dudhwalla's camera, I thought, if I opened it in the torrential rain. There was no point in trying to do anything; even the beam of my torch could not reach the tiger through the falling rain.

'Eventually the rain eased off a little and I could hear the tiger's gnawing more clearly. Then I heard a fresh sound: the squelch of giant footfalls approaching along the *nullah,* wading through the rushing water that I could hear gurgling down the watercourse below. An elephant!

'Probably is was too wet for it to eat and it just wanted to shelter, for he was breaking no branches. It squelched nearer and nearer.

'The tiger heard it too and did not like it. It let out a terrific "Wr-aah!" Ordinarily it would slink away, for tigers and elephants avoid one another as much a possible. But this tiger was an exception. It was eating.

'Moreover, it was angry. So he snarled again and again: "Wr-aah! Wr-aah! Wr-aah!"

The squelching stopped abruptly. The elephant attempted to strike its trunk against the ground in the usual note of alarm and warning. But its trunk met mud and water instead of firm earth, and the resulting noise sounded more like somebody with a severe cold blowing his nose.

'This annoyed the tiger more and he growled louder than ever, and the elephant would have as likely as not gone away then and left the tiger to its feast, and me in peace, but for an unfortunate turn of events.

'There was a sudden gust of wind and the end of the tarpaulin

waved like a flag, banging against the branches of the tree almost above the elephant's head. The tiger took off with a leap at hearing this new sound and crashed into the undergrowth at the elephant's side. This startled and angered the great beast; confused and alarmed, it did not know whether the tiger meant to attack it or if the strange object that was lashing about above its head spelled danger. It looked up and saw everything: the tarpaulin, the *machan* , and me!

'Jumbo let out a terrible scream and rushed straight at the soap-nut tree, its forehead banging against the trunk with a sickening thud. The heavy rain had saturated and loosened the earth, the tree-trunk went off the perpendicular and assumed a slant, and I knew well enough that with another push or two it would come crashing to the ground.

'Jumbo screamed again, backed a little and was obviously gathering itself for a further assault. Although it was very dark, I could faintly make out his shape, so close as to be almost within arm's reach, directly to my left. A faint streak of whiteness against that inky-black background indicated its tusks and confirmed that it was a bull. Moreover, I could smell him now. In spite of the rain that must have washed him well, his body gave out the rank, unmistakable odour of a wild tusker, especially strong when the animal is angry.

'In the next rush the soap-nut tree would fall to earth and take me with it. so I started shouting madly, at the top of my lungs, the first words, just any words, that came into my mind. My voice had the desired effect—at least for the moment. The elephant delayed his charge and screamed again. The next second would decide my fate.

'My electric torch! Why had I not thought of it before? The light was sure to frighten him off. Hastly I grabbed it and shone it directly into the elephant's face.

'By all the rules of the game he should have beaten a hasty retreat. Instead, he screamed louder than ever, and a second later I felt as if a steamroller had hit me, when he dashed his forehead a second time into the trunk of the soap-nut tree. In slow motion, as if deliberately staged, the tree heeled over to the accompanying noise of rending roots. Then, gathering momentum, it crashed to earth, carrying me, *machan* and everything with it.

'When I felt myself falling I grabbed at the branch above my head so that, apart from the shock, I should receive no physical injury. I thought fast. The first idea that came to mind was to dash for it; but I was enmeshed in the branches of the blasted tree and could not find my torch. In falling I had let go of it in order to grab the branch. God knows where it had gone. It was pitch-dark and to escape from the entanglement of bamboos that formed the *machan* and which were now jumbled all around me, and from the branches of the tree itself,

would take a considerable effort, and would lead the elephant to where I was.

'The elephant solved the problem by finding the end of the tarpaulin that had been threshing about in the breeze and seizing it with his trunk. One end was still tied to a branch, so he tore it in two and I could hear him tramping and stamping upon the other piece a few paces away.

'I cowered among the branches, but peeped out to see if I could discover how close he was. It was utterly black everywhere, but his movements betrayed that he was within fifteen feet. I could smell him strongly and hear him breathing as he slogged the end of the tarpaulin against the ground with his trunk, stamped upon it and tore it to shreds. The noise continued for a full minute or two when another noise reached me. I could hear men shouting.

'They appeared to be approaching, and soon I could make out dad's voice and another, which I recognized as Thangavelu's. The twinkle of lights in the distance showed that they were carrying lanterns or torches. Abruptly the bull stopped beating the tarpaulin. He was silent for a moment and then banged the end of his trunk against the ground in alarm and anger. I heard him turning around to face the approaching men.

'Dad and Thangavelu were coming in at the run now, shouting as they did so. I knew my father was unarmed and that it was going to be touch-and-go whether the enraged bull decided to charge them or beat a retreat himself. Perhaps if I started shouting it would help to confuse the dammed beast.

'Just then, stumbling and squelching down the water-filled *nullah* the two men came, holding their lanterns in front of them and shrieking like banshees. The old man was yelling "Don, are you all right?" but I dared not answer. The elephant was far too close and the sound of my voice would bring him down upon me.

'The flickering lights showed me the towering form of the creature as he faced them, his trunk curled inwards, the inevitable sign of an elephant on the verge of a charge. I would have to do something to divert his attention, so I let out a yell and kept on yelling.

'The elephant trumpeted shrilly. Dad and Thangavelu, who had now seen him, stopped running and held their lanterns aloft, to join in the general pandemonium, by yelling too. Dad was doing something so ridiculous that I almost laughed in spite of the danger we were all in at that moment. He was brandishing a stick.

'The screeching sounds we were all making must have sounded hideous. But, thank God, the bull thought so too and lost his nerve. He wheeled abruptly and thundered up the bank I lost no time in getting

free of the tree and getting to Dad and Thangavelu.

'"Are you all right?" the old man asked.

'I could not help smiling. He appeared in worse shape than I was and his voice was hoarse from screaming.

'"Thanks. I'm fine." I assured him.

'"Thank God," he said, and then, "Let's get out of here."

'"That's a sentiment with which I fully agree. And fast," I added, rather unnecessarily.

'We stumbled away from the soap-nut tree as quickly as we could. Elephants are individuals after all, and this one could change his mind and return.'

The following morning we went back to recover Dudhwalla's camera and Don's torch. A sight awaited us.

Perhaps the camera had been thrown clear of the falling tree, or perhaps it had got caught up in the tarpaulin. Anyway, either deliberately or by accident, the elephant had stamped it flat. Gone was Dudhwalla's camera and Donald's precious flashlight photograph of the tiger eating its kill! But we found the torch unharmed.

Later that day we sat by the swollen banks of the river, watching the spotted deer and the langur monkeys feeding and playing upon the opposite bank. The wind of the previous night had knocked down the wild figs by the thousand from the great tree on the other side of the river. A herd of about thirty spotted deer were feasting upon them, while the family of langur monkeys that had found the figs earlier and had been tucking into them were now too full to eat any more. They were frolicking and playing with one another and the spotted fawns like children. Now and again a half-grown langur would leap from the branch of a tree onto the back of a startled spotted doe, tweak her ears or pull her stumpy tail and then jump back again. The spotted stag was indignant at such activities and so were the older langurs, but the fawns frisked about, trying to play catch-as-catch-can with the younger monkeys. It was an unusual and pretty sight.

But as we were looking, death struck where all had been so peaceful. The herd of deer had moved away but the monkeys were still gambolling when a rusty brown streak leaped out of the jungle upon a half-grown langur that had strayed a short distance from the band.

For once the langur watchman had failed in his duty. Perhaps he had been too distracted in watching us to notice the lone, slinking wild dog that had successfully stalked the happy monkeys and now stood upon the opposite bank of the river with one of them dangling from his jaws.

Most of the monkeys scampered to the tree-top, screaming invectives, but the langur watchman and the big males leaped down in

concerted attack, voicing the harsh langur war-cry: 'Hok! Hok! Hok! Hok!' They were too late. The young langur was already dead.

Don and I stood up and shouted in unison. My voice, already strained by my efforts of the night before, must have sounded ghastly, for the wild dog dropped the dead monkey in fright and ran a few yards away. There he stopped to gaze at us stonily. These creatures are exceptionally bold, far more so than the great cats of the jungle. They hardly fear man, although they do not attack him as a rule.

The river was swollen and too deep to wade across, but while still shouting to keep the wild dog at bay, we made it by clambering along the trunk and branches of an ancient tree that had fallen years ago and still spanned the stream. The silver-grey body of the black-faced little langur was warm when we picked it up, the great tail, nearly a yard in length, hanging limply from the carcase.

The monkey tribe was still on the tree-top, screaming invectives at the watching murderer, while the watchman and the other males bared their teeth at the wild dog and us alternately. Then they appeared to understand that we were not responsible for the little creature's death and fell silent as we picked up the lifeless body and placed it as high as Don could reach on the crotch of the tree where the monkeys were grouped. After that we returned to our side of the river.

The langurs came down now and surrounded the carcase of their companion. Some smelled it, others handled it. An old female, who might have been its mother, picked it up and kissed it. The large black eyes in those jet black faces seemed strangely shiny and moist. Do langurs weep?

We left 'tiger-land' that afternoon, disappointed but richer in experience for our little adventure with the elephant. The geese had come down from the Himalayas in larger numbers than usual this year, and Don had planned a geese-and-duck shooting expedition with some friends. So we had to return in time to meet them. I did not join the party.

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* See: *Man-Eaters and Jungle Killers.*

Man-Eaters and Jungle Killers

Introduction

Time and civilisation march inexorably onward, bringing in their wake industrialisation, higher standards of living, and greater amenities and comforts, but at the price, it seems, of an ever-diminishing appreciation of Nature. Her face has been scarred and furrowed by man-made projects and constructions. Every minute of the day hoary trees, the giants of the forest, some of them centuries old, crash to earth, felled by the hand of man, either for the sake of the timber they provide or to make room for the constant expansion of a mechanical culture: a condition in which only a few are happy and which is occasionally punctuated by the most barbaric atrocities.

With the crash of the forest giants, other things take their departure too: the wild animals, the birds and all the living creatures that once beautified our lands. They are all disappearing, and very rapidly too!

Such was the case long ago with the American prairies, once the home of countless bison and now completely cleared of its ancient tenants. Africa is rapidly following suit. Where are those myriad heads of game that once covered the face of that wonderful land? Some still remain; but long ago the bones of the vast majority lay bleaching in the hot African sun, scattered across those thousands of miles by the bullets of avaricious, unscrupulous and money-making hunters—men who sometimes shot the mighty elephant for commercial ends, literally by thousands.

India, too, has lost much, for the decrease in the variety and number of her wild life has been alarming. I know localities where until 1930 the moaning sough of a tiger or the guttural sawing of the panther were normal sounds in the night, followed always by the warning call of sambar and other members of the deer family. Now the night passes without a sound, except perhaps for a persistently chirping cricket. Where once the pug-marks of a tiger and other wild-animal trails would tell their morning story of the creatures that had passed that way during the night, the tiny tracks of a few rabbits might today indicate that they at least have not been exterminated.

I do not wish to enter into argument as to how and why a country loses so much with the disappearance of her wild life. Anyone who has never come to know and love the jungle, its solitude and all that its denizens signify, could never appreciate such sentiments, nor the sense of irreparable loss and sorrow felt by those who look for the once familiar forms that are no longer there, or listen vainly for those once familiar sounds that were music to their ears, only to be greeted by a devastating silence.

One cannot doubt that the time will come when even the few living creatures that today remain in their natural state will have vanished, and man may then, and only then, realise too late what a priceless asset he has wantonly allowed to be thrown away.

I write these stories not only in the hope that they may afford some degree of pleasure to the adventurous, but that they may also indicate what the conditions of living, in and near the great forests of India, were once like, and to show too that one of the greatest opportunities that any individual could desire, of showing his skill and perseverance in the fine sport of 'Shikar', is now in the process of vanishing forever.

One

The Marauder of Kempekarai

If you try to imagine two parallel ranges of lofty hills, averaging four thousand feet and more above the sea, with a valley between them about five miles across, covered with dense forest except for the craggy summits, you will have in your mind's eye the background of my story. It is set in the North Salem district of the Presidency of Madras in southern India.

The hills run from north to south, and the easterly range is the more lofty of the two, culminating at its southern point in the peak of Gutherayan, which is over 4,500 feet high. On its slopes stands a lovely little forest lodge, known as Kodekarai Bungalow, amidst some of the finest scenery in the world. Rolling hills and jutting cliffs are to be seen in every direction. The sun rises in shades of rose-pink above the billowing clouds of morning mist, to set eventually in the orange-bronze reflections behind the western range. Then the moon comes up in pallid splendour, tipping the hill-tops, and later the deep valleys, with her luminous wand. Through the night she rides the heavens, silent witness of many a jungle tragedy in the dark forests below. The scream of a dying sambar or the shrill shriek of a spotted stag have often gone forth in vain to that same full moon as they spilled their life-blood on the forest floor beneath the paws of a hungry tiger.

More than twenty years ago I had the honour of meeting the brother of King Amanuallah of Afghanistan, who was exiled from his native country and lived at Kodekarai Bungalow, which was his favourite abode. He told me that he loved the place, that its scenery reminded him of his beloved Afghanistan, except that the hills of Kodekarai were forest-clad while those of his country were bare. But both of them exemplified space and freedom.

Kempekarai is a small hamlet standing on the lower slopes of the western range. Around it lie a few fields and beyond the fields the forest of dense bamboo, intersected by a rocky stream that flows down the centre of the valley.

This valley, which I called 'Spider Valley' because of the immense spiders that spin their webs across the narrow footpath that runs beside the stream, broadens out toward the south into a larger tract known as the Morappur Valley where the rocky stream finally joins the Chinnar river at a spot called Sopathy, some ten miles from the Cauvery river.

I have described the area at some length so that the reader may,

with a little imagination, share the stirring beauty: the dank smell of rotting vegetation, the twilight of a dense jungle, the distant half-roar, half-moan of a man-eating tiger searching for its prey, the eerie and deathly silence that follows those thrilling calls, and finally that faint rustle in the undergrowth, the indefinable creeping something that is the man-eater, watching as he becomes aware of your presence and pits the age-long hunting skill of his kind against the civilised intellect of man.

But let me begin my story.

Kempekarai was in a state of great fear, for a man-eating tiger had appeared, and three of its few inhabitants had already gone to fill his bill of fare.

The first victim, an old poojaree, had left Muttur, eleven miles away, to come to Kempekarai one month ago. He was never seen again. Elephants infest these areas, and very occasionally kill men, so when the poojaree failed to arrive at Kempekarai, a search-party set out towards Muttur. Perhaps the men who composed it expected to come upon the plate-like spoor of an elephant, and to find the squashed remains. But they found neither. About five miles from Kempekarai they did come upon the tracks of a male tiger, a little blood by the *path*- side, the old man's staff and his *loincloth* —and, nothing more.

Some ten days later, near sunset, a woman went down to the community well to fill her water-pot for the night. She never returned. At eight p.m. her husband and some of his friends, carrying lanterns and staves, visited the well to look for her. The brass water-pot, half-filled with water, lay on its side some twenty feet from the well, where it had been dropped by the woman on her return to the village. Of her there was no trace.

Next morning, a search-party was instituted, which duly came across the woman's saree, later a silver anklet, and finally her remains. Her head lay under a bush; her hands and feet were scattered about; of the remainder of her body, a goodly number of gnawed bones showed the tiger had indeed been hungry and had done full justice to a succulent repast.

A month dragged by. Kempekarai assumed the air of a fortress besieged. Nobody came in, and nobody went out. The immediate precincts, and in some cases interiors, of the few huts stank with human filth. Was there not a killer nearby, waiting for the first victim who was bold enough to even venture outside to answer the call of nature? The matter was particularly perilous at night; human beings, with their cattle and sometimes their dogs, were barricaded together within their cramped huts behind doors that were kept shut with logs of wood or rounded boulders from the stream. The huts became more

filthy every day, under the force of the terrible circumstances in which the people were placed.

But the very best of precautions sometimes fall short of attaining their desired results. Mara, one of the sons-in-law of my old friend Byra, the poojaree, had spurned to live in such insanitary conditions. He had told his wife that, man-eating tiger or not, he for one would not soil the inside of his house. Nightly he had gone outside to answer the calls of nature, and nightly he had returned. Then one night he went out as usual for the same purpose, but this time he did not return. His wife, anxiously waiting inside, admits she heard a dull thud, a rasping gurgle, but nothing more.

After fifteen minutes she raised an alarm. Nobody would come to her rescue, for nobody dared. The inhabitants of the barricaded huts heard her shrieks for help. They knew that by this time Mara was beyond human assistance. He was dead, but they were alive! What was the use of going outside to join him among the dead! So they remained indoors, and listened to her screaming for the remainder of that long night.

Next morning, a half-hearted attempt was made to find what was left of Mara, and it would have been unsuccessful but that the tiger had boldly eaten his fill among the bushes within two hundred yards of the village. A little more was left of Mara than had been left of the woman who had gone to the well. Perhaps his flesh was tougher, or perhaps the tiger was less hungry. Who knows? His head and torso, at least, were still in one piece.

Because of the fate that had befallen his son-in-law, my old friend Byra, who happened to be at Kempekarai at that time, undertook the hazardous eighteen-mile journey to the village of Pennagram next day. He came by himself, as nobody would accompany him, and made the journey without sight or sound of the man-eater. At Pennagram he sought out his old acquaintance, Ranga, and the two of them came by bus to Bangalore. At 9 p.m. that night voices called me to the front door, and, going outside, I was surprised but delighted to see my old jungle companions once more.

The Salem district had meanwhile adopted 'prohibition' as a guiding policy towards physical, moral and, no doubt, spiritual uplift. But my two visitors, being simple, honest forest-folk, with no such high physical, moral or spiritual pretensions, enjoyed a shot of good spirits in the form of half a tumbler of neat brandy, each. Thus refreshed, they began at the beginning, or rather Byra did, and related the brief history of the coming and doings of the man-eater, as I have told it to you, closing with the flat statement that his son-in-law, Mara, must be avenged and that I was to do it.

In the face of that argument and his childlike confidence in me, I

could find no very convincing reply. Three days later I was on the road to Pennagram, where I left the Studebaker. We bought supplies at the local market, and within a few hours the three of us were trudging those eighteen miles to the little hamlet of Kemperkarai, where the car could not go.

A couple of miles before our destination we found fresh pug-marks of a tiger on the footpath. No human traveller had passed along this track for many days, and the spoor was clear. I made careful measurements and noted that the pugs belonged to a male tiger of average size. This gave no indication whether the maker was an old animal, or of normal adult age, nor could any of us say at that time whether he was the man-eather, or just another passing tiger.

The few inhabitants of Kempekarai were unable to add much material information to that which had already been given to me by Byra. They thought the man-eater was an enormous animal, but, of course, all simple folk, when keyed up to a state of sheer terror bordering on panic, as had been the case with these poor people for the past few weeks, are given to attributing superhuman cunning and wholly impossible bodily strength and size to their oppressor.

The problem now was: how to proceed, and what to do? The answer was: wait for a kill, or present a live-bait. This particular tiger had not killed a single cow or other domestic animal belonging to the villagers. So far, at least, it had killed only human beings. The question was: would it kill an animal bait, or should that bait be human? To which the only answer was, that in the event of a human bait, it could be nobody but myself, an answer which I thoroughly disliked even to think about.

Byra, Ranga, and myself went into close conference, over successive mugs of tea, and eventually an answer began to take shape. I thought we should try animal baits, but they thought a human bait—myself, of course—would produce immediate results. I heartily wished they had reached a different conclusion.

In a three-man committee, any two of them form an overwhelming majority. The odd man must give in but I managed to force my point to the extent of agreeing that together with the human bait, there would be no harm in trying out a couple of young bullocks at selected spots as an additional attraction.

No buffaloes were available at Kempekarai, so I bought two bullocks, one of which we tied at the spot where we had found the pug-marks, and the other on the bed of the stream that meandered along the bottom of the valley. I sat on the stone parapet of the well, my back resting against one of the wooden uprights that supported the pulley-wheel, through which ran a rope for drawing water. I arranged for a metal pot to be tied to the end of this rope, which I kept beside

me on the parapet. Fresh water is always nicer to drink than that from a water-bottle.

The jungle began some fifty yards from the well in all directions except one. Here somebody had planted a dozen or more papaya trees. With the occasional watering from the well that these trees received, an undergrowth, mainly of grass with a few shrubs here and there, had sprung up around the papaya tree. In daylight this undergrowth appeared negligible, but with twilight and approaching darkness, I began to feel it presented an admirable line of approach for the man-eater, which could easily crawl through it on its belly and come within almost springing distance of where I sat, without my being aware of its presence.

When this thought came to my mind, I changed my position to the other side of the well, using the opposite wooden upright as a back-rest, so that I now faced the papayas.

I had only decided to expose myself in view of the fact that we had fortunately come at a time just before full moon. Moonrise almost synchronised with sunset, but I had forgotten that the moon still had to top the range of hills to the east before it could cast its brilliance on that benighted well. This would only happen after 8 p.m. and I spent one of the worst ninety minutes of life awaiting—I cannot hope to express how eagerly and anxiously—the first rays of that longed-for moon.

The experience brought me back to the terrible hours I had spent before the huts of Gummalapur, awaiting that horrid panther, and to the day I had sat with my back to the teak tree, in the far distant Chamala forest range, hoping for a glimpse of a similar man-eater;[1] and I wondered what had made me so foolish as once again to place myself in such an awkward predicament. Then common sense told me that perhaps it was the only way.

The darkness was deathly still, and not even the familiar nightjar came anywhere near me. A few bats flitted down the well, to sip the limpid water in a series of flying-kisses, as they quenched their thirst after the hot day. I strained my eyes, not only towards the papaya trees, but also in all directions. Imagination created the form of the man-eater, slowly creeping, stealthily stalking me, from just outside my range of vision. I sat glued to the parapet, my .405 cocked, my thumb on the torch-switch.

The thoughts that spring to a man's mind at such times are often strange and unaccountable, but why should I burden you with them? The tiger first assumed the role of possible avenging fate. At other times it practically faded from conscious thought.

Shortly after eight o'clock the skyline above the eastern range grew more distinct; a pale glow diffused itself against the sky,

dimming the stars, and then the moon appeared, lightening both the surroundings and my nervous condition. As the moon rose higher in the heavens, the scene became brighter, until I could see almost clearly between the stems of the papaya trees. Not a sound disturbed the silence of my vigil for practically the first half of the night.

Shortly after 11 p.m. a sambar stag voiced its strident call from the bed of the stream where I had tied one of my bullocks. I recognised the note of alarm and fear in its voice, as the call was repeated over and over again, to die away at last in the distance, when the stag ascended the rampart of the opposing range of hills to safety.

Again silence fell, and the night dragged out its last hours. It then struck me that I might perhaps be able to catch the tiger's acute hearing, if he was anywhere within a mile, by operating the pulley-wheel above the well, which, I had noticed earlier in the afternoon, creaked and squealed loudly as it revolved about its uncoiled axle. Perhaps he would hear and be attracted, thinking another prospective victim was drawing water from the well.

So I went around the well to where the water-pot rested on the ground. First of all I stood the firearm up against the wall, and then let the pot down till it touched the water, drawing it up and letting it down in slow succession thereafter. The pulley screeched loudly in the silence of the night, and I continued for nearly an hour, stopping every now and again to survey my surroundings intently, particularly the deep shadows cast by every bush. But nothing stirred, and in the breathless air not a leaf moved, nor did even a belated rat rustle the dried debris that carpeted the ground beneath the adjacent papayas. To all intents and purposes, I was the only living thing in that area, apart from the inmates of the huts, secure behind barricaded doors.

After 3 a.m. the moon began to sink behind the western range of hills, and the same conditions presented themselves as in the previous evening. It grew darker and darker, and soon I could see only a few yards around me, and that by the radiance of the stars that came to life, and twinkled overhead, with the disappearance of the setting moon.

There were only ninety minutes of darkness left, and I felt terribly sleepy. Still I had now to redouble my guard. Had I not been trying to attract the tiger for the past hour? As he had not passed that way all night, it was just possible he might do so now. Moreover, conditions for a surprise attack were all in his favour, as the papaya trees themselves now became undefined, except as a darker blur among the other shadows in my line of vision.

I realised that the man-eater had me completely at his mercy if he chose to attack. Should he roar as he charged, I could at least discharge my rifle at point-blank range. On the other hand, if he crept

silently upon me, I would not be aware of his coming until actually struck down.

At the same time, all the rats and rabbits, and other small animals, which had been conspicuous by their absence all night, appeared to select this moment to rendezvous near the well. They scurried hither and thither, and rustled the dead leaves, sometimes noisily, sometimes barely audibly, while my excited imagination telegraphed the urgent message 'the man-eater is coming'.

Altogether I had a dreadful time. The false dawn came and went, and then at 5.45 a.m. the brightening of the skyline once more, above the eastern range, told me that daylight was at last at hand and that the tedious vigil was nearly over. It was well past seven before the sun peeped over the eastern hills, and I arose and dragged my wary, sleepy steps to the tent I had pitched at the southern end of the village.

Hot tea and a nap till ten-thirty. Then, accompanied by Ranga and Byra, I first visited the bait tethered in the streambed. It was alive and well. Closer inspection showed that a tiger had approached to within 15 feet of it and had passed on after a cursory inspection.

The sambar stag I had heard during the night had doubtless seen or scented this tiger and had voiced his loud alarm. The tiger's pug-marks were clearly identified as having been made by the same animal as had been those I had seen while coming along the *path* on the western range, where the ground was firmer and dimensions not exaggerated. Nevertheless, I had little doubt that this was the real man-eater, for a normal tiger will not readily leave a tempting, unguarded bait alive.

We then went to see the other bullock, where a surprise awaited us. It had been killed by a tiger, whose pug-marks were identical with those I had carefully measured the previous day, near the very same spot on the pathway.

The question now was this: were there two tigers in the vicinity, or had the second bullock been killed by the man-eater? If the latter was the case and there was only one tiger— and that the man-eater— why had he not killed the bullock which had been tied in the streambed instead of just looking at it and choosing to kill the other?

I formed the definite opinion that there were two tigers in the vicinity, and that it had been the man-eater which had ignored the bullock at the stream. Ranga agreed with me, but Byra would not commit himself to either opinion. He suggested that the man-eater might be the only tiger in the area, that it had not killed the first bullock, possibly because it was a white one. The second, being dark brown, had been above suspicion.

On the question of the colour of a live-bait I have a very open

mind. In my own experience, colour makes little or no difference to a tiger, and he will kill your bait provided certain other conditions also exist. He must be hungry, for a tiger rarely, if ever, kills wantonly. Moreover, he must not suspect a trap of any kind. In these days when tiger-hunting is becoming intensified, tigers are learning their lessons quickly. Nature makes an effort to try to preserve a species which is rapidly becoming shot-out.

Thus a bait secured around the neck by a rope stands a very good chance of not being touched by a tiger. He cannot reason, but his instinct, or sense of self-preservation, tells him that it is unnatural of villagers to tie up their cattle for the night in a forest. A bait secured by a rope tied around the horns stands more chance of being killed, for it is possible for an animal to get entangled in the under-growth by its horns. A bait secured by its hind leg is also readily taken. The main point to be remembered is that both tigers and panthers attack the throats of their victims, and there should therefore be no visible obstruction to prevent this method of attack, or the attacker becomes suspicious.

Panthers are generally less careful than tigers in this respect, and take greater risks. Personally, I dislike tethering dogs as bait for a panther; I feel the practice is extremely cruel, for the dog is a very sagacious animal and knows well the purpose for which he is being tied. This being so, he must suffer terrible mental torture till his attacker arrives. When I was younger, and, I must confess, had fewer scruples, I tried to salve my conscience by protecting the dog's life. To achieve this I made a collar about four inches broad, using two pieces of leather, with numerous two-inch-long, sharpened nails in close array, protruding outwards, the heads of the nails coming between the two strips of leather. It would amuse me, in those bygone days, to watch the panther grab at the dog's throat, only to spring backwards in obvious dismay as the sharp nails pierced his mouth. Before he could solve the puzzle, of course, he was shot. But such elementary tricks cannot be played on a tiger.

Tying up a sickly live-bait is also fatal to success. The Badaga tribe, who inhabit the Nilgiri mountains, are very averse to selling healthy animals for bait, no matter what price is offered for them. They feel it is a sin to sacrifice the life of a good bullock. Invariably, they will offer only a sickly animal, whose days are numbered anyhow, for this purpose. I well remember tying up a bullock in the last stages of foot-and-mouth disease. For three nights in succession, as tracks in the sand revealed, the tiger came to the spot, walked around the bait, even squatted before it, and then decided it was too diseased to kill. On the fourth night, my son sat up over the sick animal, but by eight o'clock its allotted span of life was running out. It

collapsed and took the whole night to die. That night the tiger did not even appear.

Hunters of experience vary in their opinions regarding the colour of a live-bait, and I have met a few who avoid using white animals, either cattle or goats, because they claim that these are the least likely to be taken. A famous panther-hunter of days gone by, who had shot over a hundred panthers, was very averse to tying up a black goat, which, he claimed, made the panther extra wary in its approach.

I have digressed at some length on these points, as I feel many of you who read these stories will be interested to learn what might be called some aspects of the technique of tiger and panther shooting. In drawing-room circles we often hear of the extraordinary degree of 'good luck' that attends a certain *shikari* or big-game hunter. Actually, much of this 'good luck' is due to his previous experience of the innumerable factors that combine to make, or mar, a successful hunt.

Returning, to my story. There was obviously only one thing to do, and that was to fix a *machan* above the partly eaten brown bullock. Through experience both our baits had been tethered near suitable trees; so while I went back to the tent for a further nap, Ranga and Byra, both highly qualified in such matters, made a good job of slinging up the canvas camp-chair I had brought, neatly folded, with me. Next to a *charpoy,* or Indian rope-cot, a folding chair makes a good *machan.* It is not nearly so comfortable or roomy as the *charpoy,* but has an advantage in being easily taken to pieces and folded up.

Returning by 5 p.m., I took up my position, prepared for an all-night vigil.

The pathway, situated as it was on the western range above the village of Kempekarai, received the rays of the rising moon far earlier than did the village and the well, where I had spent the previous night. So it was that, soon after the sun sank below the western hill-tops, the moon peeped over the eastern range, and visibility was good all around me.

Nothing happened, till shortly after eight, when I became aware that the tiger stood directly beneath me. How or from where it had come, I never knew. Certainly not along the *path* which was clearly visible in both directions as it stretched away into the forest. I knew the tiger was below me by the soft noise it made as it rubbed its body against the trunk of the tree in which I was sitting, and in doing so looked up and became aware of my presence!

Things then began to happen quickly. With a snarling growl, the tiger began at once to claw its way up the tree trunk. Fortunately, we had selected a tree with fairly straight trunk till the first crotch was reached at about fifteen feet above the ground—where I was sitting on the camp chair. I knew that this was the man-eater, for normally a

tiger would have decamped at once on becoming aware that a human being sat above him.

Instinctively I drew up both legs as high as possible, while leaning over the chair sideways and to the left, to get in a shot. Unfortunately, I had leant in the wrong direction, for the tiger was trying to climb the tree on my right side. I quickly corrected myself, but now had to hold the rifle to my left shoulder.

It took you longer to read the preceding two paragraphs than events actually took that night. As I have said, I was sitting about fifteen feet above the ground. A normal tiger is about nine feet long from nose-tip to tail-tip. Subtracting the length of his tail and adding something in compensation for an outstretched forepaw, we may come by a working figure of almost 8 feet to cover the 'stretching range' of man-eater, or for that matter, of any tiger. Deducting these eight feet from the original height of fifteen feet, we get a difference of about seven feet, which was about the distance that the tiger succeeded in climbing the tree-trunk that night. In his eagerness to get hold of me he stretched out a forepaw, and as the sharp claws drove through the canvas of the camp-chair seat, and incidentally partially through my pants, the tiger lost his balance and fell backwards to earth, while instinctively, in my anxiety to protect my rear, I half-levered myself out of the chair. I was lucky not to drop my rifle and follow in the wake of the tiger.

Now it is a peculiar fact about man-eaters, both tigers and panthers, that they appear to be craven creatures, although they attack and devour human beings. Almost without exception, such attacks are made from behind, and when the victim is not aware of the presence of his attacker. Very rarely, indeed, has any man-eater been known to carry out frontal attack or rush a person who is aware of his presence and faces him.

So it was that night, for, as he fell backwards to earth, the man-eater realised his presence had been disclosed, and no sooner had he landed on the ground than, with a bound and a snarl, he disappeared in the surrounding lantana.

I cannot say to which of our good fortunes it was that he did so, for, although I had now become aware of his presence and was prepared for him, I might easily have overbalanced, or dropped the rifle, in trying to get a downward shot at that very awkward angle, directly below me. Be that as it may, he was gone in a flash, and as suddenly and as unexpectedly as he had come.

My presence having been discovered, there was now no point in remaining motionless or silent. Reviewing the damage done, I discovered three claw-marks through the canvas of the chair, each about five inches long, where the tiger's forepaw had swept. Of these,

two had penetrated the seat of my pants — and myself inside them to a lesser extent. The flesh certainly smarted, to remind me of the fact.

Normally, the incident would evoke some mirth in the minds of mirthful people, but I would remind them that the claws of all carnivores are full of poisonous bacteria from the decomposed flesh at which they tear, and a man-eater is no exception to this rule, because the flesh happens to be human. The canvas of the chair, and the cloth of my pants, were not sufficiently thick to absorb all this poisonous material, so that there was some chance of my wound becoming infected.

I had brought with me a variety of first aids, including a good stock of procaine penicillin and my five c.c. hypodermic syringe. But all these were in my tent at Kempekarai, some two miles away. I had therefore to choose between returning immediately and taking medical precautions, or remaining till morning—which was at least ten hours ahead—by which time the poison might have spread in the wounds. In the one case I had to face the chance of an attack by the man-eater, which might be launched anywhere along the *path* for the distance of the two miles it extended up to Kempekarai. On the other hand, I had to face perhaps the more certain danger of sepsis, and a long period of incapacitation from pursuing the man-eater.

So I chose to risk the tiger, as the lesser of the two evils, and quickly letting my rifle down on the rope brought for the purpose, I quickly scrambled down myself, praying fervently that the man-eater would not choose that very moment for a second attack. Reaching the ground, I stood with my back to the tree-trunk, while I freed the rifle from the rope by which I had lowered it. All was as silent as the grave, and not a sound came from any part of the forest to give me any indication of the whereabouts of my recent attacker. For all intents and purposes he might be ten miles away, or behind the nearest bush! The brilliant moonlight bathed the jungle in its ethereal glow, making visible each leaf and grass-blade as they gracefully vibrated to the soft currents of the night-breezes that gently wafted the scent of night flowers along the glades of the forest, or blew in gusts between the aisles of its myriad trees.

After a few moments, I set forth along the path on the two-mile walk to Kempekarai. Now this path varies in width according to the nature of the soil, and the character of the vegetation, from fifteen feet at the maximum to hardly a yard. At certain spots it is fringed with long grass and at other places by lantana undergrowth. Several small streams have to be crossed, where bamboos grow in profusion, their tall swaying stems creaking to the gentle breeze, while the fronds, in obliterating the moonlight, cast ghostly, chequered patterns on the ground in front.

In such circumstances your heart thumps in your chest almost audibly and as if to leap from its cage; your nerves are frayed to breaking-point and every faint rustle heralds the man-eater's charge. The inclination is to hurry, if not break into a run. Your nerves signal you to look to one side or the other, for the tiger may be making an attack from behind or from either side!

All these emotions must be held under close restraint, for to give way to them in the least would mean panic, and panic will cause you to lose your presence of mind, with ultimate but certain destruction to follow.

The thing to make certain of is that the tiger is not in front, lying in ambush till you come abreast of him. To attack

from the rear, he has to make at least some noise in the undergrowth in order to catch up with your normal stride as you walk forward.

It is wisest, therefore, to look in front, although your eyes must search every shadow before you come abreast of it, rather than keep turning the head from side to side. Keep your rifle cocked and held in the crook of your arm, for you will have to fire from your hip, and make certain of your shot. There will be no time to raise the rifle to your shoulder and aim, for the tiger is a killer, and it is not the habit of killers, either animal or human, to go about advertising their presence. For if they did, they would soon cease to be the killer—and become the 'killed' instead.

If your quarry is wounded, you may perhaps hear a snarl or growl, but most likely that unnervingly awful, earth-shaking *'woof'* as he charges. If he is not wounded, and a man-eater, you may expect to hear just nothing, for he will be upon you in the twinkling of an eye.

Hardly a quarter-of-a-mile before Kempekarai there is a low outcrop of boulders on both sides of the *path.* This is the most dangerous spot in the journey home, as the tiger could be behind any one of those boulders. However, seeing him head the other way when he made off, I felt he had not had enough time to retrace his steps. With this mental assurance, I negotiated the rocks, and soon came to Kempekarai and my tent.

Ranga and Byra were awake, as they always remained when I went out alone, in case I should require their sudden assistance. Telling them to make a fire and heat some water, I drank some coffee that had been kept ready, and got out my hypodermic, which I sterilized in the hot water. Thereafter, mixing two phials of eight-lakh units of procaine penicillin, I gave myself a shot with the syringe.

I got Ranga and Byra to wash the wounds with a strong solution of potassium permanganate dissolved in the rest of the hot water, followed by a dressing of sulphonomide ointment. The spot was one

that could not be bandaged, or plastered, so I went to sleep hoping that no ill effects would develop with my wounds.

I was tired after my sleepless nights, and it was nearly nine before I awoke next morning. This is a very late hour for rising in any jungle, where one is usually up and out before sunrise. The wounds, I was glad to note, were not unduly painful.

Taking another four lakhs of penicillin, and after redressing the wounds, I breakfasted excellently on porridge, bacon and eggs, and an enormously large, ripe papaya fruit from the grove by the well-side, where I had spent the first night.

Then I set off to visit my bait on the streambed, which I found as alive and well as on the previous morning. Returning the two miles up the *path* to where I had sat the previous night, I found the tiger had not come back nor touched the bullock he had killed two nights before. His pug-marks, as he had approached the tree, identified him as the tiger whose prints I had seen first.

The forests of Salem, unlike those of the Nilgiris, Coimbatore and Chittoor districts, are mostly thorny in nature, lantana and the 'wait-a-bit' thorn predominating. Along the valleys and streambeds these give way to clumps of bamboo, massed in close array. In either case, the effect is the same, namely, to make roaming or stalking unprofitable, if not impossible.

A carnivore moves silently, and the secret of its success as a hunter lies in the animal instinctively watching where it places its front paw in order to make no sound. Next it places its rear paw in exactly the same spot, as the front paw moves forward again to take the next step. The human stalker must move silently, too. He must watch carefully where he places each step, for the smallest dry leaf will crackle when trodden upon; the smallest twig will snap. Those clutching 'wait-a-bit' thorns must be avoided, too, for a single thorn is strong enough to halt your progress if it catches in any part of your clothing, while it will rip your flesh in no uncertain manner if you are foolish enough to wear shorts.

All this will distract your attention from being on the lookout for the tiger, and if that tiger is a man-eater, who will not be deterred by thorns, you are at a distinct disadvantage.

The jungle at this spot was etremely thorny, so we returned to Kempekarai to hold a council of war with the 'greybeards' of the village. The facts, as far as we now knew them, showed that:

The man-eater was a male of average size.

He particularly frequented the *path* on the western range.

He did not particularly care for bullock meat.

We were still uncertain whether or not there was a second tiger in the vicinity.

The obvious conclusion reached after this discussion was much the same as that reached by Ranga, Byra and myself on the first day we had come to Kempekarai: either await the next human kill, or offer a human live-bait, preferably somewhere along the pathway to Kempekarai as it descends the western ridge. A couple of bullocks could also be tied out elsewhere in the jungle to tempt the man-eater, but more to find out if there was another tiger operating in the same area.

The scratches which the tiger had inflicted, being located where they were, made it impossible for me to sit still for more than fifteen minutes at a stretch. This fact precluded all chances of 'sitting-up', in the literal meaning of the word. True, if I was to act as a bait there would be no necessity for me to sit still. In fact, movement would be a necessary factor in helping to attract the tiger. On the other hand, the very act of sitting would not only be agonising, but would also retard the healing of the wounds, which I was naturally anxious to hasten.

The alternatives left were either to stand or lie down. The former course was naturally not advisable for a night-long vigil, so the only practical method under the circumstances was to lie down.

We did a lot of thinking that day and eventually came by what we all thought to be a very ingenious plan. How ingenious it actually turned out—or rather did not turn out to be—you will very soon come to know.

I have already explained that the footpath down the western range to Kempekarai was crossed at several places by streamlets, bordered by dense undergrowth and clumps of bamboo. The beds of these small rivulets were rocky and admirably suited the purpose I had in mind.

It so happened that the first of these small streams to be crossed on the way down to Kempekarai, from the tree on which I had sat the night before, was the broadest of the lot, and was, moreover, closely covered with rounded boulders of all sizes. My plan was to detach a cart-wheel from one of the only two bullock-carts in the village of Kempekarai, dig a pit in the stream-bed, get inside it, place the wheel above, and anchor it securely around the circumference with big boulders. Smaller boulders, and a camouflage of dry leaves, would help to conceal the cartwheel. I would also make a human dummy and seat it somewhere on the footpath, where it crossed the stream. The cartwheel would be raised off the ground at one end, facing the dummy, to allow me a range of fire in that direction.

This was my general plan. For the benefit of those who have not been to India, I would explain that the wheel of an Indian bullock-cart —I am referring to the large type of cart—averages five feet in diameter. The circumference is of wood, some six inches wide by

three inches thick, shod with a hoop of iron to serve as a tyre. There are a dozen stout wooden spokes, all converging on a massive central wooden hub. The central hole in the wooden hub rotates around an iron axle, some one-and-a-half inches thick. The wheel is kept from falling off by a cotter-pin in the form of a flat iron nail, passing through the axle at its outer extremity. Similarly, the wheel is prevented from moving towards the frame of the cart by the axle itself, which is made suddenly thicker immediately beyond the bearing surface of the axle on the hub, which is perhaps a little over a foot in width. In what may be called deluxe models, a better bearing surface is provided by lining the hole in the wooden hub with a piece of iron or galvanised piping. 'High-grade lubrication', from the village viewpoint, is provided by applying old motor oil, perhaps once a fortnight, on the ends of the axle, after removing the cotter-pin and the wheel to do so. The oil is carried permanently on the cart in the shell of an old bullock-horn, suspended somewhere beneath the cart, and is applied to the axle at the end of any piece of stick that may happen to be lying handy, when 'servicing time' comes up.

It was too late to set the cartwheel that day, so we busied ourselves gathering old clothing from the villagers. Pants are unknown in such parts, so I contributed a pair of mine, into which we stuffed two 'legs', made of bamboo and wound around with straw. In case the pants might strike the tiger as being unfamiliar, we draped a *'dhoti'* (which is a cross between a sarong and a *loincloth)* over the pants. The body of the dummy consisted of straw rammed into an old gunny sack, over which we draped a couple of torn shirts, and a very ragged coat. The head of the dummy was a work of art; it was made from a large-sized coconut, complete with its coir fibre.

On dress occasions Indian women sometimes augment their natural hair with 'false hair', which they twist into a 'bun' or 'coonday' behind their heads, into which they stick flowers, particularly jasmine. Fortunately there was a 'belle' in Kemperkarai who was vain enough to be the owner of a coil of such hair. This we borrowed, combed out, and fixed around the coconut, to emulate the long hair of a villager. An untidily-tied, 'yokel-pattern' turban was then wound around the nut and a pair of 'chappals' or sandals were put on the dummy's feet.

Tigers, as I have said, have no sense of smell, so the dummy looked realistic enough to attract a man-eater, if only he did not watch it long enough to begin wondering at its uncanny stillness.

That night I applied fresh dressing to my wounds, and next morning helped myself to another shot of penicillin. I was thankful to note that so far no undue inflammation had occurred.

By 8 a.m. half-a-dozen willing helpers and myself had trundled the cartwheel to the crossing I had in mind. Here we busied ourselves

excavating a hole nearly four feet across by about four feet deep. This was easily done, for we were digging in the soft sand of a streambed. Some grass was then cut and thrown into the hole to absorb, to some degree, the dampness of the sand which naturally increased with the digging of the hole.

Sitting inside, I found I could adopt only a semi-crouched position, which was going to be very uncomfortable indeed, the only recommendation it offered being that it saved me from a sitting position, which, as I have said already, would have been most uncomfortable in view of my recent wounds.

The dummy we placed with its back to a tamarind tree, some fifteen feet away, which stood on the western bank of the stream where it was crossed by the track to Kempekarai; it was so arranged that its legs stuck out on the track at an angle of forty-five degrees. Thus, it would at once be visible to the tiger from any point along the streambed or on either section of the track, if he happened to pass in any of those directions. Lastly, we collected some of the larger boulders, and, as I stood guard with my rifle, Ranga and Byra gathered brushwood and debris for camouflaging the wheel.

When eventually I got into the hole, the wheel was just a couple of inches above the top of my head. There was a space of six inches between the ground level and the wheel through which I could fire in the direction of the dummy; it was made by placing two stones of that size about three feet apart under the circumference, leaving the central portion open to the sky for the purpose of ventilation. Brushwood and debris were scattered and intertwined among the boulders; it would also give me warning if he came up from behind, when the debris would crackle as he brushed against it or trod on it.

For safety's sake, I had arranged that the men should return to Kempekarai in a body, and only come back next morning, again in a body. I would be imprisoned all night in the hole, as the weight of the cartwheel with the boulders above it was too great for me to lift unaided from inside.

It was 4.30 p.m. when I entered my voluntary prison. It had taken nearly another half-hour to position the boulders on the wheel and arrange the camouflage, so that it was almost five when I found myself alone. The heat inside the hole, despite the opening above, was stifling. I removed my coat and shirt, and would have removed the remainder of my clothes but for the fact that I did not want the sand to get into my wounds.

Peeping above the level of the ground, I could clearly distinguish the dummy and quite a wide extent of the background. A clump of 'henna' bushes grew halfway down the sloping bank behind the dummy. A slight movement in that direction caught my eye, which I

found was due to the twitching, outstretched ear of a beautiful spotted stag that gazed in curiosity at the motionless dummy. The value of sitting still in a forest was then made apparent to me, for the stag gazed a full ten minutes at that still dummy. Then it appeared to lose interest in the curious object, came out on to the open track, which it eventually crossed, vanishing into the jungle on the other side. The distance between the dummy and the stag could not have been much more than twenty feet, and yet the latter was quite unalarmed. Had a human been seated in place of the dummy, he would surely have moved, even if it was an eyelid that flickered, and this would have sent the stag crashing away in alarm.

A pair of peafowl then came strutting along the track. The cock-bird stopped, fanned out his tail and rustled the quills in display to his admiring spouse. Female-like, she kept one eye on him and the other elsewhere! Anyway, she saw the dummy, took a short run, and sailed into the air. The cock, chagrined at her failure to appreciate his beauty, lowered his tail and saw the dummy too. A much heavier bird than the hen, he flapped wildly and desperately in an effort to take off, his wings beating loudly on the still evening air, before he finally managed to rise just clear of the surrounding bushes and follow his more wary partner to apparent safety.

'Kuck-kaya-kaya-khuck' crowed the grey junglecocks in all directions, as they came out along the streambed to peck a few morsels before darkness fell. 'Kukurruka-wack-kukurruka-wack' cackled the smaller spurfowl, belligerent little birds, as male fought male in little duels throughout the jungle for the favour of an accompanying hen. Drab and uninteresting as she looks, to gain her favour was for them the only interest in the world that evening.

Darkness fell, to the farewell call of the pair of peafowl, as they roosted for the night on some tall tree in the forest, perhaps a quarter-of-a-mile away. 'Mia-a-oo-Aaow' they cried, as the sun sank behind the western range.

Those of you who have been in an Indian forest will remember the almost miraculous switch-over that takes place at sunset, as the birds of the daylight hours cease their calls, and the birds of the night take up theirs. 'Chuck-chuk-chuk-chucko' cried the nightjars, as with widespread wings they sailed overhead in search of insect morsels, or settled on the ground, resembling stones against a background of sand.

It was pitch-dark where I sat and even the dummy was hidden under the shadows of the tamarind tree beneath which it was propped. I reckoned the moonlight would not reach that spot till after ten. At nine I heard the noisy snuffling and deep-throated gurgle of a sloth bear, as it wended its clumsy way down the stream in my

direction. It almost fell over the outlying debris we had placed on the streambed to give me warning of the tiger's approach, and then saw the newly-heaped boulders placed upon the cartwheel! I could have read the thoughts that crossed the little brain beneath the shaggy black hair! 'Here's a chance to find some luscious fat grubs, or a beetle or two; perhaps a nest of white ants, or, most hopeful of all, a beehive built by the small yellow bees that can hardly sting a big bear like me.'

With those thoughts, the bear fell to work on the task of **clearing** away the boulders that so carefully anchored my cartwheel.

'Shoo!' I whispered in an undertone. 'Get away, you interfering...!'

The bear heard my voice, and stopped. 'Where did that come from?' he was thinking. A few minutes' silence followed, and then he started at the stones again. 'Out! Shoo!' I whispered. The bear stopped, climbed over the boulders, and looked down between the spokes at me.

'Aa-rr, Wr-rrr!' he growled. 'Get out, you idiot!' I growled. 'Wr-oof! Wr-oof! Wr-oof' he answered, as he scrambled, helter-skelter, over the boulders, stumbled over the debris, scampered up the bank and crashed away between the dried bamboos.

Hardly ten minutes had passed after the bear's noisy departure when I heard the most infinitesimal of noises, the soft tread of the padded foot of some heavy animal. It is almost impossible to imitate that noise in speech, and less so on paper. The nearest description I can give is the very muffled impact of a soft cushion when it is thrown on to a sofa.

The tiger had come and in his silent way was negotiating the fringe of the debris we had scattered on the streambed behind me. He was picking his way carefully across it.

Would he attack the dummy? Would he pass in front of me? These were the questions that raced through my mind as I awaited developments. My nerves were taut with anticipation.

The moon had already risen, but its beams had not yet reached the shadows cast by the heavy foliage of the tamarind tree. The dummy was not visible to me, but I knew that the tiger could clearly see it.

There was silence for a time—how long I could not say. Then came the clink of a stone as it rolled above my head. Nobody had anticipated an attack in that direction; but my recent visitor, the bear, had already shown that the unexpected could happen. Now the unexpected was being repeated by the presence of the tiger above me. What had caused it to ignore the dummy, and come straight to the spot where I lay, was a mystery. Very likely, the tiger had been watching the bear, had seen its strange behaviour, had noted its hurried departure and had come to investigate. Even more likely, the

behaviour of the bear had caused the tiger to suspect human agency, which he had come over to find out himself. Or perhaps the wheel just happened to be situated on the shortest line of approach which the tiger was following to get at the dummy.

Whatever be the reason, the tiger was now barely two yards away, and above me.

As these thoughts raced through my mind, I heard the vague sound caused by the tiger's breathing. Then he stepped gracefully over one of the big boulders that held down the wheel, and peered down at me.

In the meantime I had not been idle. Screwing myself around, as best as I could, I now lay half on my back, gazing up at the tiger. The rifle I had drawn inwards and backwards till the butt came up against the side of the hole. I have already told you this hole was about four feet across, and about the same in depth. Hence it was impossible to get the rifle to point completely upwards. The most I could manage was an angle of a little more then sixty degrees with the bottom of the hole. Unfortunately, the tiger was not in the direction in which the muzzle was pointing, but was standing behind it, and directly above the spot where the butt of my rifle was stuck against the side of the hole.

Then events moved quickly. The tiger did not react quite as the bear had done. His features, dimly visible above me, contorted into a hideous snarl. A succession of deep-throated growls issued from his cavernous chest, and, lying down upon the cartwheel, he attempted to rake me with the claws of a foreleg, which he inserted between the spokes of the wheel.

I knew those talons would rip my face and head to ribbons if they only made contact, so, sinking as low into the hole as possible, I struggled desperately to turn the muzzle of the rifle towards the tiger.

All this took only seconds to happen. The tiger growled and came a little farther on to the wheel. The muzzle of my rifle contacted his shoulder and I pressed the trigger.

The explosion, within that confined space, was deafening. The tiger roared hideously as he catapulted backwards. During the next thirty seconds he bit the boulders, the wheel and even the sand, as he gave forth roar after roar of agony. Then I heard him fall amidst the debris, pick himself up, fall again, get up and finally crash into the bushes that bordered the little stream. He was still roaring, and continued to do so for quite fifteen minutes more as he staggered away into the jungle.

Finally silence, total and abysmal, fell over the forest. After the pandemonium that had just reigned, every creature, including the insects, decided it was wise to hide till with the passage of time they

could forget their fright.

The hours passed. At one in the morning a stiff breeze began to blow over the hills, dark storm-clouds scudded across the sky, completely hiding the moon, and soon the distant sound of falling rain across the western range fell upon my listening ears. Not long afterwards, large raindrops penetrated between the spokes and splashed down upon me.

Then the deluge began, such as can only be experienced in tropical countries, and particularly forest regions with dense vegetation. I was soaked to the skin, and the water began to trickle down the sides of the hole. With that came the sudden realisation that the stream, which had been dry, would soon be flowing with the spate of rain-water that was running into it from all directions along a hundred tributaries. I would be drowned like a rat in a hole.

Jerked into frenzied action, I got on my hands and knees, placed my back to the wheel and pressed upwards with all my might. The wheel did not budge an inch! My helpers had done their work of protecting me from the tiger only too well! They had placed the heaviest boulders they could find around the circumference of the wheel and I was unable to move them unaided.

There was but one chance left, and that was to dig myself out through the six-inch-wide gap we had made for me to fire through. Desperately, with both hands I scooped the earth downwards into the hole, which was already half filled with water and sand; the damp sides were collapsing, making it very obvious that within the next few minutes, unless I got out quickly, cartwheel and boulders would all come down together on top of me.

When I judged there was sufficient room for my body to pass, I pushed the rifle between the spokes of the wheel and then rested it across them. Next I started squeezing myself through the opening I had just dug, wriggling in the sand and water like a stranded eel, till I finally struggled free onto the streambed.

The rain continued to fall in torrents. I had no idea how far the tiger had gone, or in which direction, so, picking up the rifle, I first carried the dummy off the streambed and placed it high up on the western bank. Then I started to recross the stream on the return journey to Kempekarai, and as I did so, I heard the dull roar of the spate of rain-water descending the streambed from the direction of the hills.

Within a few minutes it arrived, a wall of foaming water over three feet high, carrying all before it. Logs of wood, uprooted trees, dead bamboos and flotsam and jetsam of every description mingled with the crested, frothing waters. They reached the cartwheel and covered it; then the cartwheel and boulders were swept away

downstream along with the torrent. In less than five minutes the stream had become a raging river, over four feet deep.

Thankfully appreciating the escape I had had, I began the return journey to Kempekarai. No other sound could possibly be heard above the splatter and swish of the rain. The darkness was intense, my torch throwing a circle of light before me. Moreover, the ground was extremely slippery to the soft rubber shoes that I was wearing. I had to cross three other streams, slightly smaller that the one where I sat, but all were raging torrents of water.

Half-way to Kempekarai, I saw the flicker of an approaching light. A little later, I met the party of men that were carrying it—Ranga, Byra and a few stalwarts from the village. They had realised the danger I was in when the waters rose and had risked encounter with the man-eater to come to my rescue.

Next morning the sun shone brightly on the saturated forest. We returned to the site of my adventure the night before. All streams were flowing briskly, although they were now no more than two feet deep. There was no trace of the cartwheel anywhere near the crossing. Evidently it had been borne downstream by the spate and probably smashed to bits. We combed both banks thereafter, without finding any signs of the tiger. The torrential rain had only too effectively obliterated any blood-trail or pug-marks.

Two hours later, a depressed and disappointed group, we returned to Kempekarai. There I remained for three more days, hoping to hear news of the tiger, only to be doomed to disappointment. Both Byra and Ranga felt it had died of its wounds, but I doubted this very much, as I knew I had not been able to aim sufficiently well to score more than a mere raking shot.

My period of leave, taken for the purpose of shooting this animal, had now elapsed, so I left Kempekarai on the morning of the fourth day, instructing Ranga to remain behind to assist Byra in reconnoitring. They were then to come to Pennagram, and thence to Dharmapuri, where there was a telegraph office from which they could send me a message. They were to await my reply there.

Ten days after returning to Bangalore, the hoped-for telegram arrived, stating that a pack-pony belonging to a Forest Guard of the Kodekarai Forest Lodge had been killed. Calculating from the telegram that the kill would be four days old by the time I reached it, I sent a reply, telling my henchmen to return to Kempekarai and wait there for any further events, which were to be reported by telegram in the same way.

Six more days passed, when I received a second telegram stating that a tiger had attacked the driver of a bullock-cart that was the last of a convoy travelling from the small hamlet of Morappur towards

Sopathy on the Chinar River.

This, no doubt, was the man-eater again. Within an hour I was on my way by car to Dharmapuri, where I picked up my two henchmen. We continued to Pennagram, where we left the car and made a cross-country trip of about twelve miles to Morappur, passing the Chinar river and Sopathy on the way.

I had meanwhile learned that the cartman, who had been attacked by the tiger, had saved his life by jumping from the cart, in which he was travelling, on to the yoke and then between the two bulls that were hauling his cart. He had yelled vociferously and his yells were taken up by the other cartmen in the 'convoy'. The tiger had then made off.

I spoke to this cartman at Morappur. He said that the tiger had suddenly appeared behind his cart, which was the last in the line, and had attempted to leap into it from the rear, when he had dived between his bulls for protection. Asking him why the tiger had not succeeded in the comparatively easy task of getting into the cart, the man said it had jumped half-in, and he had not waited to see any more.

Meanwhile, a party of travellers who had followed us from Sopathy brought the news that they had come across fresh tiger pug-marks, made the previous night, leading down the Chinar River.

Hearing this, we hurried back to Sopathy, and it did not take us long to find the pug-marks. The water was running in the Chinar as a silvery stream, meandering from bank to bank, and in the soft, wet sand we clearly noticed that the tiger which had made the marks must have been limping badly. The weight of the body fell almost entirely on the left forefoot, the right being placed very lightly on the sand at each step.

I have said that, 'Spider Valley' met the Chinar river at this spot. A half-mile downstream, and in the direction in which the tiger had gone, was a small longish rock in midstream. It rose some four feet above the bed of the river and was about forty feet long by eight feet wide. I decided to sit on top of that rock that night, in the hope the tiger might make his way back up the Chinar and see me in my elevated position.

Borrowing Ranga's turban, old brown coat and *dhoti,* I donned all three, the two latter above my own clothing, and seated myself on the rock by 5.30 p.m. As Ranga and Byra were afraid to return to Morappur alone, they elected to spend the night on comfortable crotches, high up in the huge *muthee* trees that border the Chinar in this locality.

The nights were dark at this time, but from my position on the rock, and as the Chinar was about 100 yards wide at this spot, I relied

upon the white sand to reflect the starlight and to reveal the form of the tiger from whatever direction it might come. Apart from being handicapped by its lameness, I knew the tiger would not charge its prey from a distance of fifty yards, but would try to stalk as close to me as possible before launching the final attack.

After testing my lighting equipment, I carefully loaded and cocked the .405, which I laid on the rock to my right, where it could not be seen by the tiger and create suspicion. I had also taken the precaution of bringing my .12 bore double-barrel Jeffries with me as a spare weapon. With L.G. slugs in the choke barrel, and lethal-ball in the right, I laid the Jeffries on the rock to my left. My flask of tea, some *chappaties* to satisfy my hunger towards morning, and my pipe completed my creature wants for the night. I sat on my great-coat, for the cushion it provided against that hard rock; I would wear it if the night should become too cold.

The usual animal and bird calls from the forest bade farewell to the day, while the denizens of the night welcomed their turn of activity with their less melodious, and more eerie, cries.

At seven-thirty it was dark; the reflecting whiteness of the sands of the Chinar surrounded my rock as if it were an island.

Just after nine there was a loud bustling and crashing and a tusker came down the bank, walked along the sands, passed the rock where I sat motionless, and continued beyond. There he met the current of breeze blowing down the river and caught scent of me. Banging the end of his trunk against the ground, and emitting a peculiar sound as if a sheet of zinc were being rapidly bent in half, he turned around, smelled more of me and hurried up the bank into the cover of the thick undergrowth that grew there. Such is the behaviour of an elephant when it is not a rogue.

At eleven I was still keeping my watch in all directions, as I had been doing since sunset. Then, half to the rear and my left, I sensed rather than saw a movement. Looking more intently, I could see nothing. No, wait! Was that not a blur against the faint greyish-white carpet of river sand? I looked away and then back again at the spot where I had just noticed the blur. It was not there!

'That's funny', I thought. 'Are my eyes playing tricks, or are they just becoming tired?'

Staring hard, I saw it again. Only it was much closer to me this time than when I had seen it first. Indeed, it was halfway between the further bank and the rock on which I sat.

I could not now risk looking in any other direction until I succeeded in defining this strange object. And as I looked it seemed to stretch, to float towards me, growing longer and shorter at intervals, but making no sound whatever.

Then in a flash I realized what it was. The tiger was crawling towards me on his belly, silently, in quick, short motions, till he judged he was within range to make his final, murderous assault.

Perspiration poured down my face and neck; I trembled with terror and excitement. But this would not do; so taking a deep breath and holding it, to allay the trembling, I offered a silent prayer to my Maker and drew the rifle on to my lap, raising it to my shoulder.

The tiger, now some twenty yards away, saw my movement and seemed to guess that his presence had been discovered. A thin black streak, his tail moved behind him. The blur became compact as he gathered himself for the charge. My torch-beam fell full on his snarling, flattened head. Then the rifle spoke, a split-second before he sprang.

With my bullet he rose and bounded forward. I owe my life to the fact that the torch did not go out, and I was able to fire a second shot. Then he had reached the rock.

Because of his earlier wound, or my recent shots—at that moment I could not tell which—he failed to climb up. My third bullet, fired at point-bank range through the crown of his skull, stopped the charge that had all but succeeded in reaching me, and he rolled back on to the sands of the Chinar, his career at an end.

Whistling on my way back to Sopathy, I gathered Ranga and Byra from the *muthee* trees on which they were sitting. Hearing my shots, and seeing my approach along the riverbed, they gathered I had killed the tiger.

Next morning we found him to be an average-sized, somewhat thin, male. My shot from beneath the cartwheel, fired seventeen days earlier, had done more damage than I had thought, for it had passed through his right shoulder, splintering the bone, and out again. But the wound was in good condition, and I have little doubt, would eventually have healed, although the tiger would have remained a cripple. My first shot of the night before had passed through his open mouth, and out through the neck, blowing a gaping hole. Still, he had come on. The second shot had gone high, entering behind the left shoulder, passing downwards through the lungs, and out again. And still he had come on. It was only my last shot, through the crown of his skull, that had shattered the brain that impelled his indomitable spirit.

What had made this tiger a man-eater? This is the riddle that every hunter tries to solve when he kills a man-eater, be it tiger or panther, not only for his own information, but for the education of the general public. And this beast proved to be no exception to the invariable rule that it is the human race itself that causes a tiger to become a man-eater. It had an old bullet wound in the same leg—the

right —as had been injured by me in our first encounter, only lower down; embedded in the elbow joint was a flattened lead ball, fired from some musket or gun a year or more earlier.

This foreign body, embedded in that most important joint, had not only caused the tiger to suffer intense agony, but had greatly impeded his movements when it came to killing his legitimate food, wild game and cattle. It had weakened the use of the right leg, which plays an all-important part in gripping and pulling down his normal prey. Without a doubt, this was the sole factor that forced this tiger to turn to human beings as food, in order to keep himself from starving.

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1 See *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue*

Two

Alam Bux and the Big Black Bear

The story i am now about to relate concerns a sloth bear. Quite a big, black and bad bear.

All bears, as I have had occasion to remark in other stories, are excitable, unreliable and bad-tempered animals. They have a reputation for attacking people without apparent reason, provided that person happens to pass too close, either while the bear is asleep or feeding, or just ambling along. So the natives give bears a wide berth; together with the elephant, they command the greatest respect of the jungle-dwelling folk.

This particular bear was exceptional among his kind for his unwarranted and exceptionally bad temper and aggressiveness. He would go out of his way to attack people, even when he saw them a long distance away.

The reason for his unusual conduct was difficult to explain. There were many stories about him, which were as varied as they were extraordinary. The most unpretentious was that he was quite mad. Other stories had it that he was a 'she' who had been robbed of her cubs and had sworn a vendetta against the human race. I think that the bear had been wounded or injured at some time by some human being. Perhaps the most fantastic of the stories was to the effect that this bear, almost a year previously, had kidnapped an Indian girl as a mate while she was grazing a flock of goats on the hill where he lived. The story went on to say that the whole village had turned out, *en masse,* to rescue the girl, which they had finally succeeded in doing, much to the bear's annoyance; he had then taken to attacking human beings in retaliation.

Whatever the reason be, this bear had quite a long list of victims to his credit; I was told that some twelve persons had been killed, and two dozen others injured.

Like all bears, he invariably attacked the face of the victim, which he commenced to tear apart with his tremendously long and powerful claws, in addition to biting viciously with deliberate intent to ensure the success of his handiwork. Quite half the injured had lost one or both eyes; some had lost their noses, while others had had their cheeks bitten through. Those who had been killed had died with their faces almost torn from their heads. Local rumours had it that the bear had also taken to eating his victims, the last three of whom had been partly devoured.

I had no opportunity to verify the truth of these rumours, but felt that they might be true to some extent, as the Indian sloth bear is a known devourer of carrion at times, although generally he is entirely vegetarian, restricting himself to roots, fruit, honey, white ants and similar delicacies. So fresh meat, even human meat, might not be unwelcome.

This bear originally lived in the Nagvara Hills, which lie to the east of the large town of Arsikere, some 105 miles northwest of Bangalore, and in Mysore State.

It was on these hills that he had perpetrated his earliest offences. Then, as he lost his fear of mankind and grew bolder, for no apparent reason he came down to the plains and commenced to harass people in their fields at dawn and dusk. He would come out from one or the other of the numerous small boulder-strewn hillocks that were dotted here and there, to forage for food.

I had been hearing occasional stories of this animal for about a year, but had not paid much attention to them, as I felt that, like nearly all the stories one hears in India of maulings and killings by wild animals, they were greatly exaggerated. Furthermore, as I think I have mentioned somewhere else, Bruin is quite an old friend of mine, against whom I have no antipathy. I was therefore most disinclined to go after him.

But there came an incident that made me do so. I have an old friend, an aged Muslim named Alam Bux, who is the guardian of a Mohammedan shrine situated on the main road which leads past Arsikere and on to Shimoga. This shrine is the burial place of a Mohammedan saint who lived some fifty years ago, and like hundreds of similar shrines scattered over the length and breadth of India, is preserved and held sacred by the Muslim community. Each shrine has its own guardian, or caretaker; invariably some old man who is quartered at the shrine itself to keep it clean and care for it. One of his particular duties is to light a lamp over the shrine, which is kept burning all night, to signify that the memory of the saint burns ever brightly in the bosoms of the faithful.

I first met Alam Bux on a dark night while motoring from Bangalore to Shimoga on my way to a tiger-hunt. The rear wheel of my Studebaker flew off, and the back brake-drum hit the road with a terrific jolt. I happened to be alone at the time and. stepping out of the car, viewed the situation with considerable disgust and annoyance. Fortunately for me, the incident had taken place almost opposite the shrine, and old Alam Bux, waking up at the noise made by the brake-drum striking and dragging along the road, came out to see what it was all about. Seeing my predicament, the old man volunteered to help me, which he did to a very considerable extent by

bringing a lantern from his abode, gathering stones to serve as 'packing' while I raised the axle of the car, and last, but by no means least, by serving me with a bowl of hot tea. I thanked the old man, after he had replaced the truant wheel, and promised that I would look him up whenever I happened to pass his little hut again. This promise I had faithfully kept, and I never failed to bring the old man something, by way of supplies, on any occasion that I happened to pass.

Some four hundred yards beyond the shrine is a small knoll of heaped boulders, among which grew the usual lantana shrub. All around this knoll, and right up to the shrine and adjacent roadway, were fields in which the villagers grew groundnuts after the monsoon rains. Now, bears are very fond of groundnuts and our big black bear was no exception to this rule. The boulder-covered hillock offered a convenient lodging, and the groundnut fields were a great attraction. So he took up residence among the rocks.

He made his abode in a deep recess beneath an overhanging boulder. Hungry by sunset, he could be seen coming forth from his cave, and, as twilight deepened into nightfall, he would amble down the knoll and come out on to the groundnut fields. Here he would spend a busy night, eating, uprooting, and generally shuffling about over a wide area throughout the hours of the darkness. Early dawn would find him replete, with his belly full of roots and nuts, white ants, grubs and other miscellaneous fodder which he had come across during the hours or his foraging. Leisurely he would climb back to his abode, there to spend the hot hours of the day in deep and bearly slumber. I forgot to mention that a small tank, which is the Indian colloquial name for a natural lake, was conveniently situated on the other side of the hillock, so that our friend, this bad bear, wanted for nothing.

About this time the fig trees that bordered the main road which ran past the little shrine came into season, and their clusters of ripe red fruit filled the branches, spilling on to the ground beneath carpeting the earth in a soft, red, spongy mass. Hundreds of birds of all varieties fed on the figs during the day. At night, scores of flying fox, the large Indian fruitbat resembling in size and appearance the far-famed 'vampire' bat, would come in their numbers, flapping about with leathern wings, screeching, clawing and fighting among themselves as they gormandized the ripe fruit.

These numerous visitors, both by day and night, would knock down twice the number of figs they ate, which added to the profusion of fruit already lying scattered on the ground, blown down by the wind and often falling of their own weight. All this offered additional attraction to the bear, which now found a pleasing change to his

menu. It was there in abundance, just waiting to be eaten.

So from the fields he would visit the fig trees, and thus his foraging brought him into the precincts of the shrine. That is how the trouble began.

Alam Bux had a son, a lad aged about twenty-two years, who, together with the guardian's aged wife and younger sister, lived at the shrine. One night the family had their meal at about nine, and were preparing to go to bed, when the boy for some reason went outside. It happened to be a dark night, and the bear also happened to be eating figs in the vicinity. Seeing the human figure suddenly appear, he felt that this was an unwarranted intrusion and immediately attacked the youth; more by accident than deliberately, the bear bit through the youth's throat and not the face, which was his usual first objective. The boy tried to scream, and had kicked and fought. The bear bit him again, this time through the nose and one eye, and clawed him severely across his chest, shoulders and back. Then it let him go and loped away into the darkness.

The boy staggered back to his parents streaming with blood. His jugular vein had been punctured, and although they had tried to staunch the bleeding with such rags as were available, they failed in their attempt to save his life, which ebbed away in the darkness, as cloth after cloth, and rag after rag, became soaked in his blood.

The false dawn witnessed the youth's passing while the old bear, replete with figs and groundnuts, climbed back to his cave among the boulders.

Alam Bux was a poor man and could not afford the money to send me a telegram, nor even his fare to Bangalore, either by train or by bus. But he sent me a postcard on which was scrawled the sad story; it was written in pencil, in shaky Urdu script. It was stained with the tears of his sorrow. The postcard arrived two days later, and I left for Asikere within three hours.

I had anticipated that the shooting of this bear would be an easy matter and that it would take an hour or two at the most. Therefore, I did not go prepared for a long trip. I carried just my torch, .405 Winchester rifle, and a single change of clothing. I reached Alam Bux shortly after five in the evening and it did not take him long to tell me his story.

There was no moonlight at this time. Nevertheless the plan to be followed seemed a simple one; namely, to wait till it grew quite dark and then set forth to search for the bear with the aid of my torch.

With this procedure in view, Alam Bux allowed me inside his abode by sunset, and closed the door to give the appearance that all was quiet. In the dingy little room we chatted in the flickering light of a small oil lamp, while he repeatedly lamented the death of his son. In

fact, within a few minutes the whole family were weeping and wailing. I had, perforce, to listen to this continuously till eight, when I could stand it no longer and decided to go out in search of the bear.

Loading my rifle, and seeing that the torch was functioning properly, I stepped outside, Alam Bux closing and bolting his door behind me. The darkness was intense, and as I pressed the switch of the torch fixed near the muzzle of the rifle, its bright beams shone forth over the groundnut fields to my left, and the dense aisle of fig trees bordering the road to my right.

The bear was nowhere in sight and so I started to look for him, beginning with the fig trees. These trees grew on both sides of the road, so I judged the best thing to do would be to walk along the road itself, swinging my rifle from one side of the road to the other. I walked in this fashion away from Asikere for about a mile and a half, but saw no signs of the bear. I then walked back to the shrine and continued in the opposite direction for another mile and a half, but there were still no signs of the bear. So I came back to the shrine, and started to search the groundnut fields.

Bright glimmers of various pairs of eyes glared back at me, reflected by the torch beam. But they proved to be those of rabbits and three or four jackals. I circumvented the hillock and walked along the margin of the tank on the other side; where I came across a small sounder of wild pigs wallowing in the mud. But still no sign of the old bear was to be seen. I then walked closer to the foot of the knoll, and around it two or three times, shining my light upwards and in all directions. It was a tiring work, and the old bear did not put in his appearance. On the third occasion I almost stepped upon a very large Russell's viper that was coiled between two rocks in my direct *path*. Engaged as I was, looking for the reflecting gleam of the bear's eyes, I did not watch the ground before me. My foot was within a few inches of the viper when he inflated his body with a loud, rasping hiss, preparatory to striking. Instinctively I heeded his warning not to come any nearer and leapt backwards, at the same time shining the torch directly upon the snake, which lunged forth with jaws apart to bite the spot where, just a moment before, my legs had been. It was a narrow shave, and for the moment I felt like shooting the viper. But that would have caused a tremendous disturbance and might frighten away the bear, in addition to wasting a valuable cartridge. After all, the snake had been good enough to warn me, and so, in return, I threw a small stone at it, which caused it to slither away beneath the rocks.

By this time it was evident that the bear had either gone out earlier in the evening and wandered far away, or else he was not hungry and was still in his cave. I returned to Alam Bux's shack and

decided to make another tour in a couple of hours.

This I did, and made two further tours after that, making four in all, but the bear was not to be seen, and the false dawn found me still vainly circling the hillock in search of the enemy.

With daylight, I told Alam Bux that I would return to Bangalore but he begged me to stay for the day and to climb the hill and search the cave for the bear. In the meantime his wife had prepared some hot *'chappaties'* —round flat cakes made from wheat flour—and a dish of steaming tea, both of which I consumed with relish. Then I fell asleep. At about noon Alam Bux woke me, to say that his wife had prepared special 'pillao rice' in my honour. Thanking him for this, I tucked into it too, and in a very short time polished off the lot. Mrs. Alam Bux appeared highly gratified that I so relished her cooking. The sun was now at its meridian and shone mercilessly on the rocks which blazed and shimmered in the noon-day heat. It would be a good time to look for the bear, I knew, assuming he was at home, as he would be fast asleep.

Alam Bux came with me up the hill and from a distance of fifty yards pointed out the shelving rock beneath which the bear had its cave. I clambered upwards on tiptoe, the rubber soles of my shoes making no sound on the rocks. But against this advantage I was soon to feel a greater disadvantage, as the heat from the sun-baked stone penetrated the rubber and began to burn the soles of my feet.

Coming up to the entrance of the cave, I squatted on my haunches and listened attentively.

Now a sleeping bear invariably snores, often as loud as does a human being. If the bear was fast asleep, as I hoped he would be, I counted upon hearing that tell-tale sound. But no sound greeted my ear, and after sitting thus for almost ten minutes, the sun began making itself felt through the back of my shirt. Some pebbles lay at hand and, picking up a few, I began to throw them into the cave.

Now such a procedure is calculated to make any sleeping bear very angry. But I could still hear nothing. So I went closer to the entrance and threw the stones right inside. Still nothing happened. I threw more stones, but again with negative results. The bear was not in his cave.

Descending the hill, I told Alam Bux the news and announced my intention to return to Bangalore, asking him to send me a telegram if the bear put in a further appearance. I gave him some money, both for the cost of the telegram and to tide him over immediate expenses. Then I left for Bangalore. A month elapsed, and I heard nothing more.

About twenty miles across country, and in a northwesterly direction from where the shrine is situated, the forest of Chikmagalur, in the Kadur district of Mysore, begins. About halfway between

Chikmagalur and Kadur stands the small town of Sakrepatna, surrounded by the jungle.

The next news that came to me was that a bear had seriously mauled two woodcutters near Sakrepatna, one of whom had later died. The district Forest Officer (D.F.O) of Chikmagalur wrote to me, asking if I would come and shoot this bear.

I concluded that it was the same bear that had been the cause of the death of Alam Bux's son, but to look for one particular bear in the wide range of forest was something like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack, and so I wrote back to the D.F.O. to try and get more exact information as to the whereabouts of the animal.

After ten days he replied that the bear was said to be living in a cave on a hillock some three miles from the town, near the footpath leading to a large lake known as the 'Ionkere' also that it had since mauled the Forest Guard, who had been walking along this *path* on his regular beat.

So I motored to Chikmagalur, picked up the D.F.O., and proceeded to the town of Sakrepatna, where there is a small rest house owned by the Mysore Forest department. Here I set up my headquarters for the next few days.

As luck would have it—or bad luck, if you call it that— the very next afternoon a man came running to the bungalow, to tell us that a cattle grazier—his brother in fact—had been grazing his cattle in the vicinity of the very hill where the bear was supposed to be living, when he had been attacked by the animal. He had screamed for help. and his cries had been mingled with the growls of the bear. His brother, who was lower down the hill and nearer the footpath, hearing the sounds had waited no longer, but had fled back to the bungalow to bring us the news.

Now bears are essentially nocturnal animals never moving about during daylight. At most, they may be met with at dusk or early dawn, but certainly not in the afternoon. Probably the unfortunate grazier had strayed too close to some spot where the bear had been sleeping, causing it to attack him at that unusual time. That could be the only reason for this strange attack.

It was nearing 4.30 p.m. when he brought us this news, and I set forth with my rifle and torch and three or four helpers to try to rescue the grazier who had been attacked. We soon found that the distance to the spot was much greater than we had been told by the unfortunate man's brother. I figured I had walked nearly six miles into the jungle before we came to the foot of a hill that was densely covered with scrub, including clumps of bamboo. It was then nearly six and, being winter, it was getting dark. The men I had brought along refused to come farther, and said that they would return to Sakrepatna, advising

me to accompany them and suggesting that we should go back next morning to continue our search. The brother of the missing man volunteered to wait where we stood, but was too fearful to come farther into the jungle. The most he could do to help me in finding his missing relative was vaguely to indicate, with a wave of his arm, the general area where the attack had occurred.

I went forward in that direction, calling loudly the name of the man who had been mauled. There was no answer to my shouts, and I advanced deeper and deeper into the scrub. By this time it was almost dark, but I did not feel perturbed, as I had brought my torch and began to flash it about as I sought a way through the undergrowth.

Soon it became so dense that I could make no further progress, and was on the point of turning back, when I thought I heard a faint moan, away in the distance. The ground at this point sloped downwards into a sort of valley that lay between two ridges of the hill, and the moan seemed to come from somewhere in the recesses of this valley.

The missing man's name was Thimma, and, cupping both hands to my mouth, I shouted this name lustily, waiting every now and then to listen for a reply. Yes! There, undoubtedly, it was again! A moaning cry, feeble, but nevertheless audible. It definitely came to me from the valley.

Forcing my way through the thickets, I struggled down the decline, slipping on rocks and loose stones, catching myself every now and then on the thorns. After a couple of hundred yards of such progress, I called again. After some time I heard a moaning answer, somewhere to my right. I proceeded in this fashion, following the cry till I eventually found Thimma, lying at the foot of a tree in a puddle of his own blood. His face was a mass of raw flesh and broken bones, and the only way of distinguishing that he was breathing was by the bubbles of air that forced themselves through the clotting blood. In addition, the bear had raked him across the stomach with its claws, tearing open the outer flesh, so that a loop of intestine protruded. He was hardly conscious when I found him, and I soon realised that what I had taken to be a moaning reply to my calls were just the groans he kept making, every now and then, in his delirium.

The situation was critical, and after examination I saw that another night's exposure would cause him to die by morning. There was therefore no alternative but to carry him back to the spot where I had left his brother. Lifting him on to my shoulder was a tricky business, in the terrible state that he was in. To make matters worse, he was a heavily built man, equal to myself in weight. But I managed to lift him and, using my rifle butt as a prop, began to struggle upwards the way I had come.

I never wish to experience again so terrible a journey. I had almost gained the ridge down which I had lately come when the accident occurred. My left foot slipped and came down heavily between two boulders. There was a sharp, shooting, wrenching pain as I collapsed on the rock with Thimma on top of me, while the rifle clattered to the ground.

I had sprained my ankle, and was now myself unable to walk. From where we lay, I began to shout to the brother; but after nearly an hour I realised he either could not or would not hear me. There was no alternative but to spend the night with the dying man.

Desiring to make the torch batteries last the night, if that were possible, I refrained from using them more than was necessary. The early hours of morning became bitterly cold and Thimma's groans became more and more feeble, till eventually they turned into a gurgle. I realised he was dying. At about 5 a.m. he died, and there I sat beside him till daylight eventually came, shortly after six.

I then made a determined effort to drag myself to my feet, but found my leg would not support my weight. I tried to crawl, but the thorns formed an impenetrable barrier. They tore my hands, my face and my clothing to shreds. I soon gave it up and became reconciled to the fact that I would have to wait till a rescue party came to search for us.

It was well past noon before the Forest department people, accompanied by Thimma's brother and a dozen villagers, came anywhere near the scene. Eventually, guided by my shouts, they located us, and that evening I was back at Sakrepatna forest bungalow, lying on the cot with an immensely swollen ankle. The D.F.O. turned up at about nine o'clock and drove me in my car to Chikmagalur, where I went to the local hospital for treatment. It was a week before I managed to hobble around. You may guess that by this time I was extremely angry with myself at the delay, and more so with the big, bad, black bear that had caused all the trouble. I was determined that I would get him at any cost, just as soon as I could walk.

In the meantime he had not been idle, but had mauled two more men who had been walking along the *path* to the lonkere Lake.

Four days later saw me back at Sakrepatna, just about able to walk, although not for long distances. Here I was told that the bear had taken to visiting some fields about a mile from the village, bordered by *boram* trees, the fruit of which was just then coming into season. At 5 p.m. I reached the trees in question and, selecting the largest, which had the most fruit, decided to spend the night at its foot, hoping that the bear showed up. I sat on the ground with my back to the trunk, my rifle across my knees.

Shortly after eleven I heard the grunting, grumbling sound of an approaching bear. He stopped frequently, no doubt to pick up some morsel, and as he came closer I heard the scratching sounds he made in digging for roots. He took nearly an hour to reach the *boram* tree, by which time I was amply prepared. Finally, he broke cover and ambled into the open, a black blob silhouetted in the faint glimmer of the stars.

I pressed the torch switch and the beams fell on him. He rose on his hind legs to regard me with surprise, and I planted my bullet in his chest between the arms of the white V-mark that showed clearly in the torchlight. And that was the end of that really bad bear.

Bears, as a rule, are excitable but generally harmless creatures. This particular bear carried the mark of Cain, in that he had become the wanton and deliberate murderer of several men, whom he had done to death in the most terrible fashion, without provocation.

Three

The Mamandur Man-Eater

This animal was a female, and young at that; so there was no apparent reason for her becoming a man-killer. But because she began her depredations shortly after the death of the man-eating tiger of the Chamala Valley—whose career I have told in the story entitled 'The Striped Terror of the Chamala Valley' [1] —and operated partly in the same locality, there were perhaps some grounds for the local gossip that set her down as the mate of that august killer. Another, and equally likely explanation, was that she was a grown-up cub, who had learned the evil practice of man-killing and man-eating from her evil sire.

Whatever her antecedents, this tigress made her first attempt at killing a human being when she attacked a herdsman, who attempted to succour a fine milch-cow, which she had chosen to attack from amongst his herd of cattle, and whose neck she had just skilfully broken. The herdsman very bravely but foolishly attempted to frighten the tigress away from the fallen cow by shouting and brandishing his staff in the air. Mostly such tactics have the desired effect of frightening the tiger away, but in this case the effect was just the reverse. Instead of bounding away, the tigress bounded towards the herdsman, covering the short twenty yards that separated them at incredible speed. The herdsman turned tail and bolted, but the tigress dealt him a raking blow with her front paw that opened the flesh from shoulder to buttocks. The weight of the blow bore him to the ground; but in this, her first attack on a human being, the tigress apparently considered she had inflicted enough damage, for she turned back to the cow she had just killed.

With returning consciousness, the herdsman could hear the crunch of bones a mere forty yards away as the tigress fed on the cow. Fortunately, this man kept his head and did not attempt to get to his feet. In all probability any such movement would have provoked a second, and this time fatal, attack.

So he lay as he had fallen, on his face, but by stealthily moving his head very slowly and slightly, he was able to see the tigress as she fed.

He told me afterwards that he would never forget the next hour for the rest of his life. Apparently, the tigress stopped eating every now and then, raised her head and glanced in his direction. Once she got to her feet and even took a few steps towards him. The poor fellow

almost screamed with terror, and nearly made the mistake of moving. Perhaps his very terror saved his life by making him incapable of movement. Fortunately, the tigress then changed her mind and returned to the cow.

It was more than an hour, the herdsman told me, before the tigress eventually decided she had eaten enough. She then leisurely sat on her haunches, licked her forepaws thoroughly and began to clean her face. With a final backward glance at his recumbent figure, she at last got to her feet, stretched herself contentedly and walked off into the jungle.

The herdsman lay still for another ten minutes, to make perfectly sure she had really gone. Then he got to his feet and dashed homewards as fast as he could run.

There is at least one other, equally remarkable, end to this story: the deep scratches the tigress had inflicted healed completely in spite of the absence of any proper medical treatment, apart from some crushed herbs, mixed with cow-dung, which the native doctor rubbed into the wounds. Perhaps the shawl he had been wearing, draped across his shoulders, had prevented the poisonous matter under the claws from entering the bloodstream.

This incident had occurred scarcely four miles from Mamandur railway station, where a rocky escarpment fell sharply for about three hundred feet into a forest glen, through which ran a little stream.

The next incident was also one of mauling, but this time the victim was not so lucky. Again it was a cowherd who was involved, an elderly man who died of his wounds. The events were much the same as in the earlier case. The tigress had dashed into a herd of cattle that was grazing a mile to the west of the railway line that cut through the forest, and had once more selected a milch-cow for her victim. As the frightened cattle stampeded past the elderly herdsman, he ran in the direction from which they had come to learn the cause of their alarm.

Soon he came upon the tigress, astride the dead cow. This time no attempt was made to frighten her off; the herdsman just stopped in his track in surprise. But evidently the tigress resented his appearance on the scene, for she attacked and mauled him severely. Then she walked back to the dead cow and dragged it away into the undergrowth.

It was three hours before help came to the old man. The cattle had stampeded across the railway line. The old man's brother, coming in search of him, saw that the cattle had moved and that their owner was nowhere to be seen. Standing on the railway embankment, he called loudly to his brother, but got no response. Then sensing that something was wrong, he hurried back to Mamandur village for help.

The search party, following the tracks of the stampeding cattle,

came upon the mauled man. He was unconscious and almost dead from loss of blood. They carried him to the village and then to the station, intending to put him in the guard's van of a goods train that was due in half-an-hour, bound for the town of Renigunta, nine miles away, where there was a hospital. But the old herdsman died before the goods train reached Mamandur.

Only at her third killing did this tigress develop man-eating tendencies. She again attacked a herdsman, on this occasion at about nine in the morning. How it happened was related by a second herdsman, who was standing beside the first at the time of the attack. The tigress dashed out amongst the herd as usual and leapt upon a young bull. Somehow, she failed in her initial attempt to bring the bull down. On the other hand, the bull, with the tigress on his back, dashed madly to where the two herdsmen were standing. One of them —the man who lived to tell the tale—bolted. The other just did nothing, but appeared to be rooted to the spot with surprise.

The fleeing man looked back only once, in time to see the tigress leap from the bolting bull on to the terror-stricken herdsman. He saw no more, for the very good reason that he turned away and ran as fast and as far from the spot as he could.

When the rescue party turned up some hours later, armed with sticks and matchlocks, the body of the victim was not to be seen. So the party went back for reinforcements. Another three hours elapsed before the rescuers, now numbering nearly a hundred men, arrived at the scene of the attack. They followed a clear trail and found the corpse, lying on its face in the sandy bed of a narrow *nullah.* A part of the chest and buttocks had been eaten.

Three further human kills followed during the next couple of months. Of these, one was a herdsman, one a traveller on the Renigunta road, and the third a Lumbani, who had gone out to gather wild honey. Thereafter, all cattle-grazing stopped, as did also the collection of wild honey. No more travellers dared to come by road on foot. They came by train instead.

Mr. Littlewood, the district Forest Officer at the time, wrote to me, suggesting I might spend a few days at the beautiful Forest Bungalow at Mamandur and try to bag this tigress. With fifteen days' privilege leave to my credit, I caught the night mail-train from Bangalore; but it was 3.30 p.m. next day before I alighted from a slow passenger train at the little wayside station of Mamandur.

The forest bungalow lies a bare seven furlongs away on the top of a small hillock. The *path* to the bungalow traverses the small village of Mamandur, where I stopped for some time to make it widely known that I had come especially to shoot the tigress. My object was to get the news to spread from mouth to mouth, so that I would not only

pick up all available known details about the animal, but, more particularly, would be acquainted with the news of any fresh kills that took place, either animal or human. I also negotiated the purchase of three buffalow heifers, which I paid for in cash, placing them in the charge of the local *shikari* , a man by the name of Arokiaswamy, whom I had engaged on earlier visits to Mamandur.

The bungalow had a wide and well-sheltered verandah. From its hillock fire-lines, or 'forest-lines' as they are sometimes called, radiated in five directions. Those south and south-westwards ran close to the village and railway embankment respectively. The other three struck far into the forest, and the eye could travel along them for many miles. The fire-line to the north stretched away towards the escarpment where the very first herdsman had been mauled by the tigress. Those to the east and southeast travelled in almost straight lines into the labyrinth of the jungle, like the spokes of some giant wheel. The country in both these directions was flat.

In years gone by, when game was far more plentiful, I had spent many a pleasant early morning or late evening, standing on the verandah or on the plinth of the bungalow with a pair of powerful binoculars, looking along those forest-lines. It was very common to see sambar, spotted deer and peafowl cross from one side to another. I had seen bear on three occasions, early in the morning, and a tiger crossing the northern fire-line at five in the evening. Also, although quite two miles away, I had witnessed a pack of eleven wild dogs 'ringing' an old bear. I had dashed after them on that occasion— to save the bear from the cruel fate that awaited it—arriving just as the eleven demons closed on the harried, exhausted, but brave, old beast. Three of the dogs lay dead before they realised they had to deal with a new foe. A fourth tumbled to the crack of my rifle as the pack began to run away, and a fifth joined the other four by the time the remnants of the pack were out of sight in the jungle.

I was using my old .405 Winchester rifle in those days, and had emptied my magazine. Only then did I realise I had to face a maddened bear, who had been infuriated by the dogs and the pain of the bites he had already received.

He was then about sixty yards away, and he charged straight at me, screaming, 'Woof! Woof!' I ran as fast as I could along the forest-line, and as I did so I opened the under-lever action of the .405, rammed home a cartridge in the breach, and closed the lever, which automatically cocked the rifle. Whipping around I faced the bear, which was scarcely fifteen yards away. In true bear style, when five yards away, he rose on his hind legs to deliver the final 'coup de grace', which is popularly thought to be that most fearsome of caresses, 'a bear's hug', of which we have all heard so much.

Actually, the south Indian sloth bear does not 'hug' his adversary. He rises on his hind legs to tear at his victim's face with his formidable, three-inch long talons, or to bite him on the head with his powerful teeth. In rising to his hind legs, the bear exposed the broad white V-mark that all sloth bears carry on their chests. With the one cartridge I had in the rifle, I shot him in the base of the V. He fell forward and lay still, just two yards away!

Three of the wild dogs had been males, the other two were females. The forest department paid me a reward of ten rupees for each male and fifteen rupees for each bitch. As wild dogs are very destructive to deer, their shooting is encouraged. I was sorry to have had to kill old Bruin, but he brought it on himself.

All this had happened very, very long ago.

Another factor that made this bungalow very attractive was the sea breeze that blew in from the east shortly after two o' clock each afternoon. I think, as the crow flies, the Bay of Bengal is not less than seventy-five miles from this little bungalow; and I am no authority to argue about the distance at which a sea breeze ceases to be effective. I only know that, at almost two each afternoon it turns the verandah of that little bungalow into a delightfully cool spot on which to take a nap. If you don't believe me, visit Mamandur Forest Bungalow.

It was too late that evening to tie out more than one of the three buffaloes, which only arrived at 5.30 p.m. This buffalow I took for two miles along the northern fire-line, where I tied it at the foot of a large and leafy tamarind tree. It was past seven when I got back, so I kept the other two buffaloes in the garage and asked Arokiaswamy to sleep in the kitchen.

Early next morning we were astir. First we took the bait which we had tied two miles away the previous night, and which was still alive, right up to the foot of the escarpment where the very first attack had taken place. There we secured it to the roots of a tree in a beautiful glade of rank, green grass.

We came back to the bungalow and took the second heifer along the fire line stretching to the east, where I tied it at almost the very spot where my encounter with the wild dogs and the bear had taken place.

Returning for the second time to the bungalow, we took the third and last heifer across the railway line to the west, and tied it near the spot where the elderly herdsman had been killed.

It was past midday when I got back to the bungalow for the third time, and blazing hot too. Taking off my sweat-soaked shirt, I ate a belated cold lunch and awaited the advent of the sea breeze, which I knew would start at about two. Nor was I disappointed; for when it began, it turned that broiling-hot verandah to the likeness of the

shores of some far-distant South Sea Island, where we read that 'the sea-breezes forever play'.

The next two days were uninteresting. I visited all three baits each day, but none of them had been touched. The evening of the fifth day brought a tragedy.

The semaphores along the railway lines of southern India are lit at night by kerosene oil lamps, except in the shunting yards of the larger railway junctions. As you are no doubt aware, every ordinary railway station has two sets of signals on each side of it; the near or 'home' signal, and a more distant, or 'outer' signal, as it is called. Normally, the kerosene oil lamps at these signals are cleaned, trimmed, refilled and lit by a pointsman or an other railway employee appointed for the purpose who does his job at about six each evening. But owing to the presence of the tigress at Mamandur, and the fact that the outer signals, both in the direction of Renigunta to the south and Setigunta to the northwest, were surrounded by forest, it had become the custom to light these lamps well before five, while the sun was still up.

That evening two pointsmen had set out on this task at 4 p.m., one walking towards Renigunta, and the other in the opposite direction. The second man never came back.

Shortly before six a body of seven men came rushing to the forest bungalow, sent by the stationmaster, to tell me what had happened. Hastily grabbing my rifle, torch and a few other necessities for a nightlong vigil, I sent the seven men back to the station, and Arokiaswamy along with them, as he absolutely refused to stay in the bungalow alone that night. Then I hurried up the forest-line that led to the west, which I knew met the railway track almost midway between the 'inner' and 'outer' signals.

When I reached the railway line, which here ran along an embankment ten feet high, I looked to my left and saw the 'inner' signal, with its red light twinkling.

'Stupid man', I thought. 'Instead of attending to the outer light first, while it was still early, and coming back to the inner on his way to the station, he wasted time on the inner light, and then went to the outer, when it was considerably later.'

Turning to the right, I walked along the embankment towards the 'outer' semaphore, which came into view when I turned a corner. As I walked, I looked along and about the tracks for signs of the attack that must have taken place while the pointsman was approaching the outer signal. I found nothing. Then I came to the foot of the 'outer', and looked up. The light was burning!

So the man had been attacked on his way back after he had attended to the 'outer' signal, and not before. Added to this was the

fact that the light of the 'inner' signal was also burning. Perhaps he had not attended to that light first, as I had originally thought. Perhaps he had lit the outer, then the inner, and had been attacked somewhere between the inner signal and the station yard.

But was that likely in view of the fact that all the area from the station up to the 'inner' signal, and even a little beyond it, was open cultivated land? Would any tiger, even if it was a man-eater, walk about thus boldly on absolutely open land in broad, daylight? It was possible, but rather unlikely.

My watch showed 6.55 p.m., and it was rapidly growing dark as I began to retrace my steps towards the inner signal, keeping now a sharper lookout than ever. An early moon had risen, which was indeed fortunate, or it would have become quite dark by this time.

Almost at the spot where I had first come on to the embankment from the forest-line was a small culvert, crossing a narrow but deep *nullah*. Something white there caught my eye, fluttering between the sleepers of the railway track as it spanned this *nullah*. I stopped, and peered between the sleepers.

It was the white *dhoti* worn by the railwayman. Wedged under a boulder, twenty feet away and clear of the embankment, lay an elongated, dark shape, which I knew to be the body of the victim. Even in that uncertain light I could tell that the body had been partly devoured in the short time that had elapsed since the kill had taken place. The neck had been bitten through, and the head lay about a yard away. Because the tigress might perhaps be in the vicinity at that moment, or even watching me from the cover of the bushes, it would be unnecessarily dangerous to descend the embankment and make a closer examination of the body.

A hasty survey of the position made me decide to lie at right angles across the railway lines and exactly in the middle of the culvert. I would thus be safe from attack from the front or rear, as to do this the tigress would have to leap a clear fifteen from the bottom of the *nullah* on to the track. This left her the choice of attacking me along the track, either to my right or left. I should have told you that the span of the culvert was about twenty feet. Not much, but it would at least give me time to see the tigress.

Of course, there was the possibility that she would creep up at an angle to the embankment and attack me obliquely, either from the front, or worse still, from behind; and either to the left or right of me.

It was a chance that had to be taken.

I had already clamped my torch to the rifle walking from the bungalow. I placed my haversack beneath my chest, to soften contact with the rail. This section of track was broad gauge, which means that the lines were five feet six inches apart. By spreading my legs widely, I

found my soles just touched the other rail and did not overlap it. The teak—weed 'sleeper', on which I lay, was perhaps eight inches wide: not over-comfortable to lie on and awfully hard!

The moon was shining brightly by this time and lit the scene clearly. The corpse and its severed head were clearly visible against the lighter colour of the rock and the finely-grained white sand of the *nullah* in which it lay. Everything was deathly silent.

The red light glimmered from the friendly inner signal; it seemed to remind me that help was close—but yet so distant.

The hours ticked by; a sambar stag belled from the jungle to the west. Perhaps that call heralded that the tigress was on the move! No, for it was answered by another stag, further away to the northeast, and then by another to the east. Periodically, the spotted deer also gave vent to their sharp cries of alarm, 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!'

But the cries did not come from any one direction; if they had done so, that would have indicated definitely that some carnivore was afoot in that area. They came from all sides, far and near, indicating that several carnivores were on the move. Also, being a brilliant moonlight night, it was possible that packs of wild dogs were on the hunt. These animals chase their prey by day and never on a dark night, but on brilliant moonlit nights, in certain jungles, they occasionally reverse their habit and hunt by moonlight.

At midnight silence reigned again. And then the hair at the back of my neck began to rise, for what I was witnessing was eerie indeed. The severed head had rolled on to its side!

All this time it had been staring heavenwards; now its lifeless eyes and face were turned to me. Yet no animal had touched it, for it lay in the open, clearly visible in the bright moonlight.

I felt myself tremble and grow cold. I licked my dry lips and stared at that terrible head.

Again it moved! It had tried to roll back to its former position; it had turned halfway and then, as if it lacked the strength to complete the move, it had rolled back again and was staring me in the face.

Now I may tell you I am a very practical person, not superstitious, nor afraid of the dark. I had spent many a night in a similar or even more dangerous position; I had sat over half-eaten human bodies before, and on earlier occasions I had imagined that I had seen them move. But never before in my life had I seen a severed human head actually turn around of its own accord, then try to turn back again and fail; finally, to roll back in obvious despair.

I almost cried out and for quite a while was seized with a powerful urge to get up and run towards the twinkling, friendly red light of the 'inner' signal. Then common sense reasserted itself. A dead head, human or otherwise, cannot move of its own accord. Something

must have moved it!

I stared at the head intently, and the bright moonlight showed me the answer to my problem. Two black objects could be seen moving in the white sand. They were 'rhinoceros beetles': large insects, more than an inch-and-a-half long, with great spikes on their noses resembling the horn of a rhinoceros, from which resemblance they had got their name. Generally they are nocturnal, although one frequently sees them on forest roads, early in the morning, and again late at evening, busily rolling a ball of cow-dung, perhaps thrice their own size, to some unknown destination.

These two little creatures by their combined strength had succeeded in rolling this head over once, but the second time they had not quite succeeded. I had been so absorbed by what I saw that I had forgotten all about the tigress; she could easily have surprised me at that time.

It was now 1.40 and the rail beneath my chest began to tremble. Then I heard a distant rumbling sound which gradually grew louder and nearer. A sharp whistle rent the air and soon the brilliant headlight of an engine fell full upon me. It was the Night Mail from Madras to Bomaby.

Stiffly I got to my feet, lifted my haversack, walked to the end of the culvert, and then a couple of foot down the embankment. But I had entirely forgotten to take into account the vigilance of the driver of the train. He had clearly seen me in the bright headlight of the engine, although he had not noticed my rifle. As he was to tell me in a few minutes, he took me for a would-be suicide, deliberately lying on the track in order to be run over, whose courage had failed him at the last moment. I may mention, incidentally, that this method of committing suicide is rather popular in India.

Anyhow, with a grinding of brakes and violent hissing of steam, the train drew up just after the engine had passed me. The next thing I heard was the loud thudding of boots on the hard ground as figures ran towards me. It was the driver and his two firemen from the engine.

They charged up and grabbed me. Only then did they realise that I was obviously not what they had taken me to be. In the meantime, heads popped out of carriage windows, and a hundred voices began to question and conjecture. The guard came up from the rear with his bulls-eye lantern. So I had no alternative but to tell them what I was doing.

'Where is the man who has been eaten by the tiger?' asked the driver, a middle-aged Anglo-Indian. I pointed the corpse out to him. 'And you have been lying here in the open by yourself since evening?' he asked, incredulously.

When I replied in the affirmative, he added, very simply, 'You are quite mad,' and tapped his forehead significantly. His two firemen, and the Indian guard of the train, nodded heartily in agreement.

A few minutes later, the Mail puffed onwards, on its long journey to Bombay, and I was left alone once more. But I had little hope of the tigress putting in her appearance after so great a disturbance.

At 2.30 a.m. the rails began to rumble again. This time I lay flat on the embankment, hiding my rifle, before the engine's headlight betrayed my presence. As a result, the goods train passed me by without stopping. At 4 a.m. again the rails rumbled and trembled, and I hid once more. It was the return Mail, from Bombay to Madras, that thundered by at full speed, as mail trains do not halt at Mamandur.

The false dawn came and went. The distant call of awakening peafowl fell on the air, as they cried, 'Mia-a-oo-Aaow' across the forest valleys to be answered by the cheery 'Whe-e-e-e-Kuch-Kaya Kaya-Khuck'm' of that most lovely bird, the grey junglecock.

A pale shell-pink tinted the sky above the eastern hills that stood sharply outlined now in velvety black. Meanwhile, the moon, which had held sway all night and was now about to set, began losing some of her brilliance.

In the east the shell-pink turned marvellously to mauve, then to a deep rose, tinged at its edges by the palest of greens and the purest of blues. The rose became orange-purple then orange alone, then deep red, and finally flame, as the glowing tip of the sun peeped above the wave-like lines of hilltops to the east.

Radiating beams of sunlight, cast heavenwards by that rapidly growing orb, touched the racing, fleecy clouds in the sky with all the colours of the spectrum. Then, suddenly, just as a butterfly bursts forth from its chrysalis, the sun surmounted the hills, driving before her, in eddying swirls, the wisps of mist from the damp jungle below.

It was another day, and to welcome its birth a glad chorus of song burst from the birds of the forest all around me. Every bush and tree throbbed with life, fresh, clean and new. Those who have seen the marvel of an Indian jungle sunrise will never forget it.

The head still stared up at me, but it was still now; the two rhinoceros beetles that had worked so diligently throughout the night had long since abandoned the unequal task and gone to rest.

I made my way to the station, disappointed and slowly, to tell the stationmaster he could allow the relations of the dead men to remove the remains for cremation, and by eight I was asleep on the verandah of the bungalow. In the afternoon the sea-breeze lulled me to a deeper slumber.

At 4 p.m. I awoke, feeling refreshed and fit, and ate a quick lunch-cum-tea, while listening to Arokiaswamy's report that he, with

four others, had visited all the baits and had found them alive. It certainly looked as if this tigress was not going to kill any of the heifers I had tied out.

Then came sunset and bright moonlight. I felt like taking a walk. If I kept to the centre of any one of those five radiating forest fire-lines, I felt I would be safe enough, provided I maintained a sharp watch while I walked. There was also the definite chance of attracting the tigress, should our trails cross during the night.

I dressed for the occasion. In my own kit I had only khaki clothes and a black shirt which was useful for night *machan* work. So I went with Arokiaswamy to his hut, where I slipped on a long white shirt, allowing the shirttails to flutter loosely outside my khaki pants. Arokiaswamy further completed the disguise by tying a white turban round my head.

I did not know what the tigress would take me for if we met; but I know I was a source of considerable amusement to the villagers, who were somewhat shocked to hear of my plan.

I debated for a moment which fire-line to walk up first and decided to follow the one leading in the easterly direction. It was 7.30 p.m. when I started to walk. I kept in the centre of the line, and as I moved I allowed my eyes to rove freely around and about the bushes and undergrowth on both sides. Occasionally I glanced backwards.

Although the moonlight was brilliant, the bushes cast long black shadows, and clumps of thorns and grass looked ghostly grey around me. I realised that, for all the moonlight, my eyes could never pick out a lurking carnivore in that unreal sheen, even if it showed itself, which it would not. I should have to rely on my sense of hearing—and that other, my sixth sense!

At ten-minute intervals I whistled a bar of some tune or other to advertise my presence to the tigress; but only for half-a-minute at a time, so as not to impede my own ears, that were attuned to catch the slightest sound.

Thus, many a subtle rustle did I hear in the grassy hillocks as I passed them. Invariably, the nocturnal bamboo-rat was the culprit, as he scampered for cover at my approach. Then an indefinable, prolonged, slithering rustle: that was a snake, probably a Russell's viper, coiling comfortably around and around himself in the grass, to be cosy and warm. Something heavy descended from the sky, neatly on the back of a hare as it scampered across the fire-line. The hare squealed, and the great horned owl, which had attacked it, pecked it sharply on the forehead. I approached the owl, which extended both its wings to the ground to hide the hare from me, much in the same way as does a hen with chickens. I approached closer and the owl glowered; I drew closer still and the owl flew away. I picked up the

limp hare and rubbed its back briskly. With regaining consciousness, it began to kick vigorously. I let it go into the long grass.

There were no bison in these jungles, nor elephants, but in their stead bear were plentiful. Nor was it long before I came upon Bruin, engaged in his favourite pastime of sucking white ants out of their hills. A distant sound, midway between a buzzing and a humming, a queer noise rather like someone inflating a bagpipe, or the sound of angry swarming bees, first told me that a bear was afoot. It grew louder and louder and was punctuated by grunts, coughs, whimpers of impatience and growls of annoyance.

There, to one side of the line and to my right was a white-ant hill. There standing up against it, with its head inside a hole, was a shaggy, black shape. It was the bear, blowing, sucking, grumbling, swearing and complaining, as he met with little or no success. Rarely there would be a chuckle of sheer joy as something succulent went down.

He was deeply engrossed in his task as I padded silently on my way, and the sounds of his feast receded behind me, growing fainter and fainter. I walked for two hours along that line, then turned and retraced my steps. Bruin had gone home by the time I came to the ant hill again, and it was then only half its original height, due to his efforts. I saw nothing else till I reached the Forest Lodge.

Next, I turned up the northern fire-line and walked towards the escarpment. This line did not run straight like the one I had just abandoned. Rather, it twisted and turned considerably as I approached the escarpment. A stream intersected it at the third mile, in which a trickle of clear, cold water sparkled like silver in the moonlight.

Stooping down, I drank, conveying the water to my mouth in my left palm; my right hand held the rifle with its butt to the ground, while my eyes watched the jungle and my ears strained to catch the slightest sound. There was nothing visible, and the only sound was the gurgle of the water. I went on.

The bait I had tied was around the next corner. It was alive, and as I passed it looked at me with dumb reproach for the cruel fate to which I had exposed it. I had no answer, no excuse! That I was guilty there was no doubt. I turned my eyes away, but could not rid myself of the sense of guilt.

At last the base of the escarpment was reached. Here the fire-line stopped and became a narrow game-trail that plunged abruptly into the labyrinth of greenery. It was too dangerous to go any further under such conditions and I turned back.

All I passed on the return journey was a large cobra in the process of swallowing a bamboo-rat. Three-quarters of the rat were

down the cobra's throat, only the hindquarters and tail protruding, when I came upon the scene in the middle of the fire-line. The snake saw me and raised its head two feet above the ground, simultaneously erecting the fine bones of its neck to form that most beautiful and at the same time most enthralling of sights to a newcomer to India; the well-known cobra's hood. The hind legs and tail of the rat still dangled incongruously from its mouth. The beady black eyes glittered malevolently in the phosphorescent light.

I rapidly stamped my feet and clapped my hands. The cobra became nervous and finally panicked. It vomited the rat, lowered itself to the ground with deflated hood, and slithered away into the bushes to one side of the fire-line.

Once more I was back at the bungalow. I had covered twenty miles, and it was 2.45 a.m.

Two fire-lines remained to be tried, but there would only be time to negotiate one, either the fire-line running to the south-east, up which I had not yet been since my arrival, or the line to the south-west, crossing the railway embankment, where I had sat the previous night over the dead body. For some unaccountable reason, I chose the latter.

I reached the railway track, crossed it, and had walked over a mile further towards the west, when suddenly the silence was shattered by the moaning call of a tigress. It appeared to come from a point no more than a couple of furlongs in front of me. Perhaps the beast was walking along the same fire-line; she may have been going away or perhaps coming towards me.

Doubling forward for the next 50 yards, I hid behind the trunk of a large wood-apple tree, cocked the rifle and raised it into position. Then I gave the deep-lunged moan of a male tiger.

Almost immediately it was answered, from much closer than I thought—perhaps a hundred yards away. I did not dare to call again, for fear that I should be recognised for the imposter I was.

Tiger-calling should not be indulged in at close quarters, for fear that the real tiger should discover a difference in the timbre of the call. Should he become suspicious, he may just fade away. One hundred yards is about the closest range at which such mimicry can be tried. Of course, man-eating propensities, and also curiosity, from which most animals suffer to some degree, might still cause the tiger to come forward, but there is always the risk that suspicion may drive him off. So I remained silent—and still.

Thirty seconds later, a tigress strode down the forest-line towards me, the moonlight playing upon the black stripes of her coat. She came abreast of me, then began to pass.

I shot her behind the ear. Only her tail twitched as she sank to

the ground. She never knew what happened; she had no chance. It was an unsporting shot.

Anyhow, at Mamandur no human has been killed now for some years. The tigress, which was young, was in the best of condition and there was no reason why she should have become a man-eater. Perhaps, after all, the Chamala man-eater had taught her the bad habit.

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1 See the author's earlier book, *Nine Man-Eaters and one Rogue.*

Four

The Crossed-Tusker of Gerhetti

This is the story of another elephant that earned the name of a 'rogue', and was proscribed by the government of Madras by notification through the Collector and the district Forest Officer of Salem.

The events I am going to relate took place quite a time ago. As usual with rogue elephants, no one knew just what caused this elephant to start molesting human beings. The forest guard then stationed at Gerhetti stated that, one night about a month before the rogue began his depredations, he had heard two bull elephants fighting in the forest. According to his story, the contest had raged off and on for over three hours, and had taken place in the vicinity of a water hole situated just about half a mile in front of the forest bungalow.

Next day he had found the jungle trampled down and great splashes of blood were everywhere in evidence of the punishment that had been inflicted. Judging by the account he gave me, and from the pandemonium that had raged, it must have been a mammoth struggle. Possibly the rogue, as we came to know him, had been the elephant that had got the worst of that fight and from this moment had begun to vent his spleen on all and sundry.

Another explanation might have been that the rogue, was just an ordinary bull elephant in a state of *'musth'* a periodical affliction that affects all elephants and lasts for about three months, during which time they become extraordinarily dangerous.

A third possibility was that this elephant had been wounded by one of the many poachers that are to be found in the forests of Salem district. These gentry sit up over water holes and salt licks to shoot deer that visit such spots during the hot and dry summer months. Generally, when a poacher sees anything more formidable than a harmless deer, he keeps very quiet or slinks away if he feels the going is good. Yet even amongst poachers we find a few that are 'trigger-happy'. They discharge their muskets at any animal that puts in an appearance, and it may have been that one of these adventurers had wounded the bull and started him on his career as a rogue.

It may even have been that a simple peasant, guarding his crops by night, had shot at him with his match-lock. Elephants are fond of destroying crops that grow close to the forest.

Whatever it was that had originally upset him, the rogue of Gerhetti started his career quite suddenly, and for the short time he

held sway in the fastness of the jungle where he lived, he became a terror, bringing all traffic, both bullock-cart and pedestrian, to an end within an area of about four hundred square miles.

Gerhetti is the name given to a tiny hamlet comprising some five or six huts about two miles off the track leading from Anchetty to Pennagram in the Salem North Forest Division. The country here is very hilly, and thick bamboo jungle grows to a distance of about three miles from both banks of a rocky stream known as Talvadi Brook, which joins the Cauvery about fifteen miles southwest of the spot I am telling you about. This bamboo jungle nearly always harbours herds of elephant and quite often three or four independent elephants, which although not rogues, are very carefully avoided by the jungle folk.

Another stream, called Gollamothi, flows almost parallel with the Talvadi rivulet, about twelve miles north of it, and joins the Gundalam river, itself another tributary of the Cauvery. These three rivers, with the hills that surround them on all sides, and the thick bamboo jungle that abounds, makes an ideal habitation for any elephant, and it was here that the rogue started his career as a killer.

It began like this. With the midsummer heat, the Gollamothi stream had dried up, except for one or two isolated pools of water which had managed to survive, being formed between huge rocks that cropped up on the riverbed, and fed by subsoil percolation. One of these pools was known to hold fish of some size, perhaps six to eight inches in length, and one afternoon two men from the village of Anchetty, five miles away, decided they would go to this pool and net some fish in the restricted area that had resulted from rapid evaporation.

So they arrived at the pool and cast their nets. Soon they had made a considerable catch. They then put the fish into their baskets and lay down under a shady tree by the side of the water hole to enjoy a brief siesta.

It was about five when one of them awakened. The sun had just sunk behind the top of a hill that jutted out to the west of the pool, but it was still quite bright. As he sat up beside his sleeping companion, something caused the man to look behind him, where he saw the slate-grey bulk of an elephant descending the southern bank of the Gollamothi on its way to the pool.

The man reached out and vigorously shook his companion, to whom he whispered in Tamil *'Anai Varadbu',* which means 'an elephant approaches'. Then he got up and ran to the northern bank and into the forest. His companion, suddenly aroused from sleep, did not quite grasp the significance of the warning, and as he sat looking around and wondering what had happened to his friend, the elephant was upon him.

The man who escaped told me he heard the screams of the friend he had left behind, mingled with the shrill trumpeting of the enraged elephant. Then there was silence. Naturally, he had not waited to hear more. Two days later, when the search party from Anchetty came to look for the remains, they found a pulpy mass of broken flesh and bones decaying in the hot sun. There was evidence that the elephant had first placed his foot upon the man and then had literally torn him apart with his trunk. He had carried one leg to a spot ten yards away, where he had beaten it against the gnarled trunk of a *jumblum* tree before finally throwing it away among the rocks.

That was the rogue's first victim. His second attempt was upon a herd-boy who was driving his herd at sunset to the cattle *patti* at Gundalam. This boy, being young and agile, had fled along the sands of the dry stream, hotly pursued by the vicious elephant. Finding he was losing ground, the boy had the sense to run up the steep side of the hill where the rocks were very slippery and small loose boulders abounded. This had enabled him to maintain his lead.

In his mad rush to escape, the boy cut his bare feet literally to ribbons on the protruding sharp stones, while his body was lacerated in a hundred places by the thorns and shrubs that sought to hold him back. But he had kept on running, and managed to escape the elephant by climbing on to a high rock that protruded about two hundred yards up the hillside.

He told me afterwards that when the bull reached the rock, he walked around it several times, trumpeting and attempting to reach his victim with his trunk. But the boy kept his head, and moved around with the elephant, keeping as far as possible from the tip of that dreaded trunk. He told me that the top of the rock was only about twenty-five square feet in area and that the snake-like tip of the killer's trunk had sometimes been within a foot of his ankles. Nevertheless he had managed to avoid it, and after an hour of this game the elephant suddenly lost interest in his victim and wandered away. Still the boy had been too frightened to come down and had spent the night on top of the rock, only getting down the next morning after the sun had risen high in the heavens, when he felt that the elephant was nowhere in the vicinity.

After this there had been a lull for a month, when the few folk who lived in the area began to feel that the elephant had perhaps departed to other regions, or alternatively, if it had been in *musth,* that *musth* season had elapsed and that its condition had returned to normal.

But they had been far too optimistic, for exactly five weeks after unsuccessfully chasing the herd-boy this elephant attacked two wayfarers as they were journeying through the forest to the village of

Nattrapalyam, which lies about eight miles south of Anchetty. These men had been suddenly chased by the rogue and had begun to run along the forest path with the animal in hot pursuit about hundred yards behind them. One of these men was about thirty years old and the other some ten years older. Age soon began to tell on the older man causing him to lag behind, his breath coming, in sobbing gasps. He knew that a terrible death was behind him, and he tried his best to keep running. Unfortunately, he had quite lost his head, and made no attempt to circumvent the animal, as he might have done, by perhaps climbing a tree, or by getting behind a rock or even by throwing down a part of his clothing as he ran. This last action might have served to delay the attacker for a few minutes. For when chased by an elephant, it is advisable as a last recourse to shed some part of one's clothing; when the elephant reaches it and catches the strong human smell, he will invariably stop to tear it to ribbons. In the precious seconds thus gained, the victim has a chance of making good his escape.

But this unfortunate man simply ran on till he could run no more. The elephant overtook him as he lay sprawled on the *path,* his body heaving to the gasps of his tortured lungs. Soon their services on this earth were ended, for the elephant picked him up in his trunks and dashed repeatedly against a wayside boulder, beating him to pulp before finally tossing him aside into the jungle.

As a result of these incidents, petitions had been forwarded, through Forest authorities, to the Collector of Salem district to proscribe this animal 'rogue', which means that permission was granted for the elephant to be shot by any game-licence holder in the district. Normally, the elephant is strictly protected in India. Red tapism, as anywhere in the world, is a slow process, and this is particularly the case in India, so that three months or more elapsed before action was taken to issue the necessary order. A further month's delay occurred before all game-licence holders in the district were notified.

Meanwhile the 'rogue' was rather busy. He attacked a bullock-cart that was laden with sandalwood cut by the Forest department. The driver of this cart, and the forest guard who was accompanying the sandalwood, escaped by running into the forest, but the cart was smashed to pieces and one of the bulls slightly injured.

Not long afterwards, the rogue did rather an-unusual thing. Cattle, let loose by graziers in the forest, generally scatter over a fairly wide area. One of these animals evidently strayed too near the rogue, which attacked and broke the beast's back.

A further short lull was followed by the news that he had killed a 'poojaree', one of a jungle tribe of this area, as he was returning with honey from the forest for the contractor who had bought the right

from the Forest department to collect all the wild honey in this particular division.

Then the official notification reached me. As a rule, I take no pleasure in elephant-shooting, as I have a very soft corner for these big and noble animals. Secondly, I feel it is a comparatively tame animal itself; elephants invariably give away their position by the noise they make in the undergrowth when feeding. It is then a comparatively simple matter to get up-wind of the quarry and stalk to within a short distance of it. All that is required is a little experience in knowing where to place one's feet, to avoid stepping on dried leaves or twigs that crackle and so give away the stalker's position.

Another very important aspect of 'still hunting' is the ability to 'freeze', to become absolutely still in whatever position you may be at that moment, if the quarry looks your way. This may prove a little awkward at times, when in a half-crouched position, but to straighten up or squat down would be fatal, as the slightest movement involved in doing so will give the stalker away. The thing to do is to remain absolutely and completely 'dead', even for as much as ten minutes in the same half-crouching position. I can assure you that this can sometimes be extremely tiring.

By these methods I have often stalked elephants to within a few yards and watched them grazing peacefully, without their being in the least degree aware of my presence. But the slightest whirr or my scent, or the slightest crackle underfoot, would have sent them thundering away. An elephant has surprisingly poor sight, and if you are dressed in military khaki-green and you keep absolutely still, it will often look your way without ever becoming aware of your presence.

For these reasons, as I have said, I do not like shooting elephants. Also, many of the so-called rogues are not rogues at all. As I have mentioned before, poachers and cultivators are in the habit of firing at elephants and often wound them in the process, when they become embittered against the human race. Again, many of the incidents reported against the so-called rogues never occurred, for people interested in shooting an elephant sometimes concoct tales and urge the villagers to write exaggerated reports in order to induce the Collector to proscribe the rogue. Collectors as a rule go into such matters very carefully and thoroughly before issuing orders; but sometimes, with all these precautions, elephants are killed which are not rogues at all in the real sense.

So I did not pay much heed to the notification till it was followed, about three weeks later, by a letter from Ranga, my *shikari* who lived at the town of Pennagram. He wrote to report that the elephant had killed a poojaree woman four days previously at a spot called Anaibiddamaduvu, which lay about seven miles from Gerhetti.

The literal interpretation of this name is 'the pool into which the elephant fell'. It is a natural pool, formed by steep rocks on the bed of Anaibiddahalla river, a sub-tributary of the Chinnar river, which itself is a tributary of the Cauvery, that largest of south Indian rivers. Moreover, this pool is deep and never dries up, and I am told that many years ago an elephant, while reaching for water with its trunk, fell in and could not get out again because of the steep and slippery rocks that ringed it. Elephants are good swimmers, and have herculean strength and endurance, but they also have great bulk; so this poor creature, after swimming round and round in the pool for three days continuously, slowly sank and drowned before quite a large crowd of people who had come all the eleven miles from Pennagram to witness the 'tamasha'.

After receiving Ranga's letter, and as some time had passed since I had last seen him, I got leave of absence for four days and motored down to Pennagram. I picked him up and covered the eighteen miles or more of terribly bad forest road that leads to the Gerhetti forest bungalow, passing Annaibidhamadhuvu on the way.

The forest guard at Gerhetti told me that the rogue was in the vicinity, as well as a herd of about ten elephants. All these animals were in the habit of drinking at the water hole in front of the bungalow, and as there were several animals in the herd of about the same size as the rogue, it would be difficult to know which was which. This precluded any possibility of following with any degree of certainty any particular set of tracks.

Further, the description of this animal in the notification was very vague; it merely stated that the measurement around the circumference of the forefoot had been 4'10", which made the elephant approximately 9'.8" tall, as twice the circumference of the forefoot is the approximate height. The colour was reported as black, but all elephants are black after they have washed, but they soon cover themselves with sand or earth. Sand in the forest is of different hues, varying from red to brown, grey, and almost black. So this was no distinguishing factor either. The only feature that appeared to identify the elephant was that the two tusks, which were reported to be over three feet long, met and crossed near their tips.

You will therefore understand that the last factor was the only one by which I would be able to identify this particular animal, for it was doubtful if he would give permission, to approach and measure his height! But to see if the tusks were crossed meant getting a frontal or head-on view of the elephant, as at an angle tusks may appear to cross without actually doing so. I certainly did not want to shoot the wrong animal, apart from the immense amount of trouble and official explanation that would follow.

This meant that I could select any set of tracks that came up to the measurement of the rogue and follow them till I came upon the animal that had made them, then manoeuvre for a frontal view of the animal to see whether he possessed the hallmark of crossed-tusks. If he did, he was my elephant. If he did not, I would have to start all over again by going back to the pool and following another set of tracks. It must be remembered that I had only four days at my disposal, and of these four days one had already passed in picking up Ranga, coming to Gerhetti and making the necessary inquiries.

At about ten that night I heard the sound of elephants feeding in the vicinity of the pool. This was undoubtedly the herd, and the rogue would not be with them. So I went to sleep again.

At dawn I started with Ranga and the forest guard on my plan of following up one of the sets of tracks. The margin of the water hole was fairly ploughed up by a mass of footprints of all sizes, where the herd had watered the night before. These included the tracks of some very young elephants, which could hardly have been over three feet tall.

Circumventing the pool, I found three sets of tracks which came near to the size of the rogue. Two of these three sets, I noticed, had been made on the same side of the pool as the herd had watered, while the remaining set had been made by an elephant which had approached the water from quite another direction. I therefore argued that this third animal might be the rogue, and we began to track him in single file. Ranga went in front, following the tracks; I followed, covering him with my double-barrelled 450/400 Jeffries; the Forest Guard came behind me, his duty being to guard against an attack from the rear in case it happened that the elephant had gone round in a semicircle, and was now grazing behind us.

For a short distance after leaving the water the ground was covered by long spear grass and clearly revealed the passage of the elephant the night before, being trampled flat in all directions. Then the spear grass gave way to the usual thorny growth of lantana and wait-a-bit thorn. Here also it was comparatively easy to see where our quarry had passed, but our own passage became more difficult by reason of the thorns that plucked and tore at our clothing.

Yet the tracks were clear and we made fairly good time for about a mile, when we reached the base of a small hill. The slopes of this hill were covered with heavy bamboo growth, and the elephant had passed through this, climbing the hill as he went. He had also stopped to feed on the tender shoots that spring from the end of the fronds of bamboo, as was clearly evident by the havoc he had created in the mass of broken bamboo stems we met along this trail. Here he had passed a considerable quantity of dung, and as we reached the top of

the hill and went down the other side, it was evident that the elephant had fed until the early hours of that morning; for the dung was fresh and had not had time to cool.

From here onwards our passage became laboriously slow. The dense bamboo completely surrounded us and a careless step by any one of us resulted in a rustle or sharp crackle, depending on whether we trod upon the leaves or bamboo fronds.

I touched Ranga's elbow and motioned to him to stand still, the guard and myself doing the same. We listened for over ten minutes for the familiar sounds of a feeding elephant, or the deep rumble that issues from his cavernous stomach in the process of digestion. But the forest was comparatively silent except for the cheery calls of grey junglecocks everywhere around us, and the distant whoops of langur monkeys on the opposite hillside.

Evidently our quarry was resting, or had perhaps passed further down into the deep valley that lay before us. As the latter seemed more likely, we proceeded on tiptoe, slowly and carefully in his wake. We had all to keep our eyes down to make sure we did not trample on anything that would betray our presence. Another half mile brought us to the valley, where the undergrowth was extremely dense; wild plum, wood-apple, and mighty tamarind trees grew profusely everywhere, making visibility beyond fifteen to twenty yards impossible. Another two hundred yards brought us to the rocky bed of a small tributary of the Gollamothi river.

The elephant had here skirted the bed of the stream and crossed it at a sandy spot fifty yards further down. The opposite bank, up which he had then climbed, was fairly steep, so that we were now faced with the prospect of having the elephant above us, which is hardly the best way of meeting a 'rogue'.

We went forward very slowly indeed, and as silently as was humanly possible. Our quarry had stopped feeding, and was now on the move again. We soon saw that he appeared to be making for another valley that lay beyond the spur of the hill up which we were now climbing. Having reached this conclusion, we began to move faster, but had gone only another quarter-mile when we heard the rumbling sound made by the elephant's stomach in the process of digesting his heavy meal.

I sent Ranga and the forest guard up a stout tamarind tree and crept forward alone in the direction of the sound. The elephant was in a small depression, densely wooded by bamboo. Evidently he was resting, or perhaps lying down, as there were no sounds of his feeding. By this time the rumbling had also ceased.

Very carefully, almost inch by inch, I went down into the depression. Then stopping for a moment, I gathered a little soft earth

in my hand and held it up before me, letting it drop in order to see from which direction any current of air might be blowing. The earth fell straight, indicating that there was hardly any breeze in the depression. This was a handicap, as there was a chance of the elephant smelling me in the still air.

So I went forward, still more carefully, if that were possible. The bamboos towered above me, and I peeped around each clump as I came abreast of it. A few more yards of this sort of progress and I saw what appeared to be a slate-grey boulder before me. It was the elephant, lying on the ground, and as my bad luck would have it, facing in the opposite direction.

I could now do one of two things: either make a detour and try to come upon the elephant from the front, where I might see his tusks and identify him as the rogue before shooting, or much simpler, rouse him from where I stood. He would undoubtedly turn around to face the disturbance, so that I could then identify him and shoot before he could know what was happening.

Deciding on this second and easier course, I slipped partly behind a clump of bamboo, then softly whistled. The elephant took no notice. Perhaps he was deeply asleep, or thought the sound had come from some forest bird. Then I clicked my tongue loudly. This had the desired effect, for the elephant scrambled to its feet and span around to face me.

He was a magnificent tusker, quite ten feet tall, and his ivory tusks gleamed magnificently in the early morning sunlight. But they were wide apart, not crossed in the least. I had spent my time tracking the wrong elephant.

The pachyderm looked at me in amazement for quite half a minute, his small eyes contemplating the creature who had disturbed his slumber. I could almost read the thoughts that were passing through his brain. His first reaction, after surprise, was annoyance and he moved forward a pace or two in a threatening attitude. I gave another sharp whistle, at the sound of which his courage ebbed away, and he turned tail and bolted into the forest, the crashing sound of his retreat dying away in the distance.

By the time I returned to the spot where I had left Ranga and the Forest Guard, they had already climbed down from the tamarind tree, guessing, by the sounds they had clearly heard, that I had found an animal which was not the rogue we were after. The three of us then trudged dejectedly back to the water hole, not only disappointed, but annoyed at the time we had wasted.

As previously related, there were two other tracks of approximately the same size. They had been made in the mud of the pool and nothing could be gained by measuring them with my tape to

determine which came nearest to the notified dimensions of the rogue; soft mud exaggerated the track of any animal. Ranga followed one, and the guard and myself the other, with the understanding that we would return to the water hole in fifteen minutes for further consultation.

It was not long before I could see that the animal I was following had been one of the regular herd, for the broken undergrowth revealed the presence of the feeding cows and young that had accompanied him. He was obviously not the rogue, and in exactly fifteen minutes by my watch I turned and made my way back to the water hole. Ranga, having no watch, had not yet arrived, so I sat down to a quiet pipe and sip of hot tea from the flask carried by the Forest Guard. After about ten minutes, he came to report that the elephant had made a detour a quarter of a mile from the water hole, had moved around in a semicircle and passed through a strip of jungle that led to a hill in exactly the opposite direction, behind the bungalow.

This news seemed promising, so we were up and away. Nor was it long before we came to the spot whence Ranga had returned to report. It soon became evident that our new quarry was a traveller, for he had hardly stopped to feed, other than pluck an occasional small stem of succulent young leaves. That elephant led us on and on, over the hill behind the forest bungalow, over the next two hills, and then in almost a straight line to the Talvadi stream.

In all we covered well over four miles before reaching the bed of that stream, when we found that the elephant had turned southwest and was moving directly down the Talvadi river itself. I knew the Cauvery river lay within a distance of fifteen miles, and I began to feel our quarry had suddenly made up his mind to reach the big river. Once he did this, and particularly if he swam across to the opposite bank, it would be hopeless to follow him, as the terrain there is not only extremely dense, but leads on and on as unbroken forest and hill country to the Niligiri and Biligirirangan Mountains, over a hundred miles away.

So we passed on with all possible speed, casting discretion to the winds, but our elephant had had a lead of several hours, and judging by the long and determined strides he had taken, he had been bent upon travelling.

The soft sand of the riverbed was now scalding hot under the midday sun. It hampered my walking and trickled into my boots by means that only fine river or sea sand knows. Every now and again the streambed became rocky, and for long stretches the fine sand gave way to a succession of rounded, water-worn boulders. In such spots the elephant had pushed through the undergrowth of the banks to

avoid the boulders, and we did the same, bent double to dodge the dangling lines of creepers, and pouring with perspiration from our exertions.

Fifteen miles of such walking brought us near the confluence of Talvadi and the Cauvery. A few hundred yards from the big river, the Talvadi stream is crossed by the rough track leading from Uttaimalai village to Biligundlu. The elephant had changed direction here and had followed the track towards Uttaimalai for another two miles, before turning southwards again towards a swamp that borders the big river. This swamp, known as Kartei Palam, which means Bison Hollow, was well known to me. Years before it had been a regular haunt for bison herds that swam across the Cauvery from the Coimbatore bank to the Salem side. At this time of the year the swamp was fairly dry except in places, but lush grass grew everywhere, while shady clumps of trees dotted the whole area.

We now met with signs that the elephant had begun feeding, and as we made our way towards the centre of the swamp mounds of fresh dung showed that the animal was not far away.

The ground also became boggy, and once more I sent Ranga and the guard back to minimise the squelching sounds that were bound to arise from three people walking in the mud. Progress was necessarily at a snail's pace, for I had not only to look out for the elephant, but study the ground carefully at each step, to avoid suddenly plunging waist-deep into the clinging black clay. Yet, several times I sank knee-deep, and to extricate myself I had to struggle and flounder about, making no end of noise, before I gained a firmer footing.

Several times I stopped to listen but heard nothing, and then, without warning, there came a violent 'swoosh' of the reedy grass, and the elephant stood some twenty paces away, all dripping and covered with the sticky muck in which he had been lying. It was a big bull, with gleaming white tusks, symmetrically curved. But they were not the crossed tusks of the rogue. Disappointment and disgust so overcame me that I fairly 'shoo-ed' that poor elephant away, and when I rejoined my followers, I was in no good mood, as they could clearly see.

It was now past 4 p.m., and we had some fifteen miles to retrace along the Talvadi Stream, plus another four to the Gerhetti bungalow. Alternatively, we could camp at Biligundlu and return next morning; but this would mean the loss of another half-day, out of the two days that were left to me. So I gave the order for the return march, much to the disgust of my companions, who reminded me that, as we had no light of any kind, the major portion of our journey would have to be performed in darkness, there being no moon. We might even meet the elephant! My reply, I am afraid, was terse, and consigned this

elephant, and all other elephants, to a region they would find far too hot.

That return journey seemed one long succession of stumbling, slipping, slithering over rocks, or tripping over stumps, or being caught by creepers without sign or sound of the elephant. It was almost midnight before we limped into the Gerhetti bungalow, thoroughly exhausted and as fretful as children. We had been up with the dawn, walking incessantly, stalking through thorns, grass, river-sand and swamp, and had covered about forty miles. We were ravenously hungry and thirsty too.

Next morning I was cramped and footsore. The forest guard showed an ankle, which he had contrived to twist somewhere along the Talvadi stream, and begged to be excused from that day's operations. Only Ranga appeared fit, and ready for another hard day. Porridge, bacon and eggs, and strong coffee put new life into me, while a huge ball of 'ragi', which is a small foodgrain, boiled and made into a sphere almost the size of a tiny cannonball, washed down with coffee, would satisfy Ranga till nightfall.

We had all been too tired to hear any sounds during the night, but a visit to the waterhole now indicated the herd had returned while we had slept. There were also the fresh footmarks of two big bulls, one of which was probably the first elephant I had followed the previous day, while the other was the animal I had not followed at all. The third bull, as we well knew, we had left far away at Kartei Palam.

Nevertheless, nothing could be left to chance; so we followed the same plan as that of the previous day, tracking each of these two animals till we came up with them. By 9.30 a.m. we had come up to the first bull that we had decided to follow. He was slightly smaller than the two we had tracked the previous day, and he was not the rogue! No doubt this was the third animal of the trio whose footprints we had noted the previous day. Going back to the water hole, we set out on the remaining track, and came upon its maker at 2.30 p.m., quietly standing under a large and shady tamarind tree. Nor was he the rogue. I readily recognised him as the first animal I had tracked the previous day and had disturbed while lying among the bamboos.

Thus it was clear that the 'rogue' was not in the immediate vicinity. Three of the four days available to me had now gone, but I was still no further forward than on the day of my arrival.

At five we were back at the bungalow, brewing a large *degchie* of tea. Then at half-past five a party of bullock-carts arrived from Anchetty, eight miles away, to shelter for the night because of the presence of the rogue. The cartmen stated that at a spot about half-way from Anchetty, where the Gollamothi stream traversed the road, they had come upon the tracks of a large elephant which had crossed

and recrossed the road at several points and was evidently hanging around not far from the ford itself.

Determined not to give up till the last moment, Ranga and I ate an early dinner and, bundling the still-tired Forest Guard into the car, motored to the ford of which the cartmen had spoken.

It was 7 p.m. when we arrived there and almost dark. The car lights revealed the tracks of the elephant where the cartmen had said. At the ford itself, with the aid of torches we made out the plate-like spoor of the elephant superimposed upon the narrow ruts made by the cartwheels of our friends. Elephants do not wander about in daytime in hot weather, and this clearly indicated that the pachyderm had been on the road that very evening, before our arrival. Perhaps he had even heard the sound of the car, or seen our lights, and had moved off just before we came on the scene.

We quickly lowered the hood of the Studebaker. I handed my 'sealed-beam' spotlight to Ranga, whom I placed in the 'dickie' seat behind, but kept the guard in the front seat. I myself sat on the folded hood, my feet on the driving seat, with my rifle and torch at the ready. Complete darkness soon enveloped us, overshadowed as we were by the towering *muthee* and *jumlum* trees that bordered the banks of the Gollamothi, together with bamboo clumps, whose stems creaked weirdly to the jungle air-currents that blew up and down the dry sandy bed of the river.

The prospects were poor. To begin with, we did not know whether the tracks we had seen belonged to the rogue. They might, indeed, have been made by any elephant. All we knew for certain was that they had not been made by any of the three big males around Gerhetti. Secondly, there was not the slightest reason for this elephant to return to the ford he had so recently passed, for he had the whole wide jungle in which to roam. Thirdly, we all knew that ten miles to an elephant is scarcely two hours' easy ambling, and that when he is really travelling he moves much faster. Fourthly, the wind was blowing in all directions, and would carry our scent to any elephant within a quarter-of-a-mile and, if he was not the rogue, drive him off. On the other hand, there was the slender hope that, if this was the rogue, our scent might attract him.

So we waited in the pitch-darkness till 8.30 p.m., and then the dull sound of a hollow log being turned over came to us form somewhere upstream. The elephant was on the move at last and, judging by the sound, was some four or five hundred yards away. Silence followed for another quarter-hour, when the sharp crack of a breaking branch, much closer, indicated that the elephant was feeding and moving towards the ford as he did so.

I knew he would take thirty minutes at least to finish eating the

young leaves from the ends of the branch he had just broken, so that there would be plenty of time before he came near. The car, with us inside it, would be clearly visible to him as he came around the curve of the river, and there was every possibility, if he was not the rogue, that on seeing us he would just fade quietly away into the forest. But I had not taken the wind into consideration; just then it blew strongly from us towards the elephant.

Minuets of silence followed, and then we heard a slight rustling in the undergrowth from the bank of the river nearest to the car. It was a faint sound, apparently made by a small body in the bushes. Then the ominous crack of trodden bamboo came to us suddenly. Silence again, deep and enveloping. Even the breeze seemed to have died, to allow full opportunity for the next event.

This was the ear-splitting scream of a charging bull-elephant, mingled with the crashing of bamboos and undergrowth as they collapsed before the monster that rushed towards us.

Ranga never flinched! The beam of the spot-light cut through the enveloping gloom. My own torch-beam, mingling with that of the vastly more brilliant spotlight, showed an enormous tusker, his bulk pitch black, his trunk curled upwards and inwards, with two wicked white tusks that were crossed at the tip, thundering upon us!

At fifty yards range the bullet from my right barrel took him in the throat. He stopped with the impact, screaming with rage. No doubt this was more than he had bargained for! The explosion, the pain and the lights confused him, and he half-turned into the jungle. My second bullet, aimed hastily at the temple, struck him somewhere on the side of the head. He rushed into the jungle, stumbled on his forefeet, picked himself up again as I reloaded, and disappeared in the bamboos as my third shot struck him somewhere in the body. For quite fifteen minutes we could hear heavy crashes in the jungle as the elephant reeled, collapsed and then recovered, to continue his flight.

Starting the car, I reversed and returned to Gerhetti. I slept soundly that night, Ranga awakening me at dawn with a mugful of steaming, strong tea.

By 6.30 a.m., we were on the track of the stricken rogue. Great gouts of blood had issued from the throat-wound and had sprayed through his trunk over the surrounding bushes, which had been reddened by his passage. Soon we too were red with his blood as we pushed ourselves through the undergrowth in his wake.

He had lain, or fallen down, in several places, where the greensward had been dyed a deep red. He had leaned against several tree-trunks that were still sticky with his blood. Truly, if you do not finish the job of killing an elephant, you let yourself in for a gory trail. I really pitied this poor beast, murderous killer of men though he had

been.

After two miles I found him, half-kneeling, half-lying against a tree-trunk. He was so weak from loss of blood that he could scarcely move, although he clearly saw me as I walked towards him. The only sign of life were his wicked little blood-shot eyes, that gleamed and moved as they watched my approach. Fifteen yards away I raised my rifle to deliver the coup de grace. As if to salute approaching death, that game and mighty beast shivered from head to foot as he drew up his mighty bulk to its full ten feet. The trunk curled upwards, the big ears flapped outward, and he staggered two paces forward in his last charge, when the heavy 450/400 bullet crashed into his temple and he collapsed, as if pole-axed, to earth.

Although a killer, the 'crossed-tusker of Gerhetti' was a brave fighter, and I honoured him as he lay before my still-smoking muzzle —mighty in life and even mightier in his death!

Five

The Sangam Panther

News filtered through to my home in bangalore that A leopard, or 'panther' as it is more commonly known in India, was killing people in the vicinity of a place called Sangam, a little over seventy miles south of the city.

Man-eating panthers are rare in southern India. To begin with, the jungles are not so extensive, or nearly so continuously mountainous as in the north, particularly along the foothills of the vast Himalayan range. The exception is the Western Ghats, which are almost wholly covered with forest for over four hundred miles, with an average breadth of ten to fifteen miles. But the other forest areas are of much smaller extent and are more or less surrounded by cultivation. This causes carnivores, and particularly panthers, to confine their attentions to the herds of cattle and goats, in which the country is abundantly rich, and to a lesser extent to village curs, locally known as *'piedogs'* which are, like the common monkey, the curse of the land. Prior to the advent to hydrophobia vaccine, large numbers of persons died yearly of infection from the bite of mad dogs, as these curs constantly contract rabies, especially in the hot weather. Monkeys are and always have been a major menace, doing untold damage to crops and fruit trees. The monkey has a strong religious significance to Indians, and great objection is raised against any attempt to harm it. Panthers—at least so far as the 'piedogs' and monkeys are concerned—therefore perform a great service to the land.

In the Western Ghats of which I have just spoken, the rainfall is very heavy, even exceeding hundred inches per year. They are covered with dense bamboo, long grass, and thick evergreen vegetation—the breeding grounds of clouds of mosquitoes, ticks, leeches, flies and other animal pests.

Panthers do not like much water—and they detest the pests, in any and all their many forms! So, in the only region where they could multiply unmolested they are hardly to be found! By a natural arrangement, therefore, panthers, which are found in all other jungles of southern India, generally have plenty to eat and somehow do not become addicted to the bad habit of man-eating. A notable exception to this was the panther of Gummalapur, a story I have related elsewhere [1]; in that case there were special circumstances that caused it to take to man-eating.

In Bangalore news often reached us of people being mauled by

panthers and tigers, more often by the former. But nobody took particular notice of these rumours as on-the-spot investigation always told the same tale. Some villager, with his matchlock, or some inexperienced hunter would let fly at a panther, generally with slugs, and succeed only in hurting it. Then, inexperienced in jungle-lore, he would attempt to follow it up, through lantana bushes or amongst rocks, and get mauled—sometimes severely—for his pains. In years gone by, over seventy-five per cent of such cases of mauling resulted in death from septicaemia. With the advent of the sulpha drugs, casualties dropped to below ten per cent.

So nobody took much notice when such news came in. Why should they? They had other work to do. Moreover, rumour is invariably much exaggerated in India! A slight scratch is magnified into a severed mauling, and a mauling into a killing. When an actual killing does occur, it is widely described in the Press as several killings.

Therefore, when I heard that a panther had killed a woman, and later killed and eaten a child at Sangam, I did not believe it. Then the panther killed a third and a fourth time. The Press got hold of the news and it was splashed across the front pages.

Several hunters from Bangalore, Mysore and Madras went after the animal, but for a month the panther did not kill. One of the hunters succeeded in shooting a panther; and this fact, coupled with the cessation of human kills, seemed to indicate that it was the man-eater that had been shot. The hunters returned to the towns.

Then the panther killed once more, but was prevented from eating its victim, a man who was sleeping in a shed-like room with a pack of four mongrel dogs, with which he used to hunt hare and sometimes deer.

A thorn fence protected the entrance to the shed. The roof comprised loose bits of zinc sheeting, and the wall consisted of wooden stakes driven into the ground in close formation, the gaps being stuffed with thorns. The panther came at night, and with its paws contrived to open a passage between the end stake of the doorway and the thorn fence across the entrance. The dogs panicked, barking and howling loudly and cowering to one side. But the man must have just woken.

The panther entered the shed. The dogs clustered together but did nothing, and the marauder, walking past them, grabbed the man by the throat. He died after uttering a single, piercing wail.

The people in the neighbouring hut had been disturbed by the noise made by the dogs' barking and growling in the shed. They wondered what was happening, but nobody would go outside to investigate. The panther then tried to drag the dead man out of the

shed through the same gap by which it had entered. The gap was not big enough. So the panther itself passed through and tried to drag the man after it. But the body became entangled in the thorns and stuck fast. The panther then gave a mighty heave, which succeeded in unbalancing the fence, which fell with a crash on top of the animal. This must have frightened him considerably for he made off, leaving the corpse still entangled amongst the thorns.

The continued noise resulting from the efforts of the panther now alarmed the people in the next hut, who had been listening breathlessly all this time. They began to shout and woke other villagers. After quite a while, some of the brave men came forth carrying lanterns, armed with matchlocks, bludgeons and staves, to find the dead man, but no panther.

The alarm now spread afresh, and news was brought to me by the village *Patel,* or headman, who came to Bangalore expressly for the purpose. I was at that time able to take two days' casual leave, while Sunday made a third. So I agreed to go with him and attempt to shoot the panther within those three days.

The road to Sangam ran past the town of Kankanhalli, thirty-six miles from Bangalore, from where it began to descend sharply to the bed of the Cauvery river. The last ten miles of the track was really atrocious, and my Studebaker rocked and creaked and groaned in all its joints, in protest at such bad treatment. Hairpin bends at ridiculous gradients and sharp angles (where all milestones and furlong slabs were coloured black to prevent them from being uprooted by wild elephants, who have a great aversion to anything white), betokened my approach to journey's end, and soon I reached the little traveller's bungalow after a short but exceedingly tough journey.

The word 'Sangam' denotes a 'joining' or 'confluence', and was most appropriate, for it marked the junction of the Cauvery river with its tributary, the Arkravarthy, which flows in almost a straight line southwards from its source north of Bangalore.

The Cauvery here flows from west to east, Sangam being on its northern bank within Mysore state territory. The southern bank of the Cauvery comes within the jungles of North Coimbatore district (Kollegal Forest Division). Some thirteen miles east of Sangam, Mysore state territory ends and is flanked by Salem district, which thereafter holds the northern bank of the river with North Coimbatore district continuing along the southern bank. Both North Coimbatore and Salem districts belong to the Madras presidency.

Sangam is a beautifully wooded spot, offering in normal times first-rate masher fishing, with crocodile shooting among the sandbanks and rocks in any direction along the river. On the Mysore side of the forest there are spotted deer, sambar, barking-deer, wild

pig, feathered game, and an occasional bear, panther or tiger. Elephants often cross over from the Coimbatore bank. Along the southern bank, in the Coimbatore jungles, all the above abound in greater number, in addition to several fine herds of bison. Elephant and bear are particularly numerous.

After parking the car under the huge *muthee* trees that flanked the river and grew beside the bungalow, I walked across to the small village where the dog-keeper had recently been killed and inspected the scene for myself, in addition to being given graphic accounts of what had happened by the neighbours, who had heard so much that day, but had done nothing to help the poor fellow. The *Patel,* who had returned with me joined in the voluble tale.

With much questioning and cross-questioning, it became apparent that this panther was going to be an exceedingly difficult animal to bag, as on the north banks of the river it had a very wide expanse of jungle to wander over, without taking into consideration the many square miles of forest on the southern or Coimbatore side. But the latter could reasonably be excluded, since panthers, unlike tigers, generally dislike swimming across big rivers, although they swim well when compelled to do so.

The first, and apparently only thing to do was to tie out baits. With the *Patel's* active help, I purchased five large bull-calves. The first of these we tethered about half-a-mile west of the bungalow and about the same distance from the river bank; the second, on a line roughly parallel with the river and a mile farther west; the third, a mile farther west than the second; the fourth, on the farther bank of the Arkravarthy tributary, about half-a-mile east of the bungalow and the same distance from the Cauvery; and the fifth, a mile east of the fourth bait. Thus the five baits were roughly in a straight line, flanking the river, about half-a-mile inland and with a distance of four miles between the farthest bait to the west and the farthest bait to the east.

It was sunset before I returned to the bungalow. A cold dinner appeased my appetite, eaten on the small bungalow verandah and washed down with two steaming mugs of tea. After lighting my pipe, I sat with my back to the wall, listening to the subdued rush of the river as it sped along its rocky bed. It was a dark night and fairly cloudy. Such stars as could be seen peeping occasionally between clouds would be insufficient for night-watching, so I went inside and fell asleep.

Early next morning we checked the baits. They were all alive. I walked up the road down which I had come the previous day, climbing up the hairpin bends and ghat section. There were no panther tracks to bee seen. A herd of spotted deer and three sambar—singly and at different places—had crossed the road during the night,

but no other animal had passed.

When returning to the bungalow, instead of coming back along the road, I cut down the hill through the jungle and came on to the dry bed of the Arkravarthy, where I turned southwards and walked in the sand, looking for possible pug-marks. There were none to be seen, but the same herd of spotted deer that had crossed the road had also traversed the sands. In due course, I passed my bait number four, and came to where the Arkravarthy joined the Cauvery.

A day and a half, out of the three days at my disposal, had now passed, and I had not even seen the panther's pug-marks. The situation seemed hopeless.

After lunch, I decided to walk in the easterly direction, downstream along the Cauvery for about three-and-a-half miles, to a gorge where the river narrowed to about twenty feet. At this spot it roared through a chasm, known as Meke-Dat. The meaning of that word, in Kanarese language, is 'the goat's leap'. Legend records that, years and years ago, a jungle-sheep pursued by wild dogs on the Coimbatore side and driven to the brink of the river, performed the prodigious feat of leaping those twenty feet to safety on the Mysore side.

Here, all other sounds are drowned by the roar of the turbulent waters, hurling themselves through the narrow opening, and a man can hardly hear himself even when he shouts his very loudest.

I sat on the edge of the rocks and watched the troubled, racing river. A hundred yards away, downstream where the surface had become placid again, an occasional fish broke water, leaping into the air, as if evincing sheer exuberance and joy of living. A fish-eagle circled in the ethereal blue of a clear sky. After a while, I rose and retraced my steps to the bungalow. I had still not found any panther tracks.

The night was clear. Although there was no moon, there were none of the previous night's clouds and the starlight was enough in the jungle to enable one to see for a few yards.

The watchman in charge of the bungalow owned a *'piedog'* —the name by which mongrels in India are known— and against my custom and only because time was so short, I asked him to lend it to me till midnight. He hummed and hawed at first, but when three rupees had changed hands he agreed.

While walking along the road that day, I had noticed a rock at its edge hardly a mile away. I took the dog, tied it at the foot of the rock and walked away down the road. When out of sight of the dog, I turned to my right and cut into the jungle, coming back to the rock on its 'off' side. Silently I clambered up, and lay flat on its top. The rock was still warm from the sun that had been shining on it all day.

Thinking it had been abandoned, the dog began barking, whining and howling by turns. Dogs are too intelligent, it is unfair to tie them out as bait. Unlike cattle and goats, they sense danger at once and, even if not attacked, go through hours of mental agony. I have known a dog which was tied out as bait for a panther—although it was not harmed— become so nervous that it fell sick the following day and died within a week.

I watched from the top of the rock. Nearly an hour passed, and then suddenly a shadowy, grey shape came scampering down the road. It moved fast till about ten feet from the dog, then it stopped. Could it be the panther?

The stars shed just enough light to prevent the darkness from being total, but not more than that. I could just see the grey shape looking at the dog. The dog growled furiously as it turned round to face the intruder. It must be a panther, I thought, as I aligned my rifle in its direction preparatory to depressing the switch of my torch which was fastened along the barrel.

'Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!' said the intruder, followed by a disparaging but loud 'Cheey! Shee-ay! Shee-ay!'

It was a hyaena, the common striped hyaena of southern India. The dog growled still more ferociously; then began to bark frenziedly..

Now began an amusing drama, such as watchers by night are sometimes privileged to witness in a jungle. The hyaena darted off the road into the undergrowth, where he began to say, 'Gudda! Guddar! Garrar! Gurr-rr-aa!' ending with his usual disparaging 'Cheey-ar! Shee-ar!'

The dog faced the noise and barked loudly. The hyaena reappeared on the road, beyond the dog but watching him, and crackled, 'Ha! Ha! ha! Guddar! Garrar! Shee-ay!'

Unlike his African cousins, the spotted and the brown hyaena, the former being the familiar 'laughing hyaena' we have all heard about, the Indian hyaena is generally a silent animal, hunting alone or at the most in pairs. Spotted hyaenas move in packs. As a rule, all hyaenas are cowardly animals, although they are extremely strong for their size and have enormously powerful jaws, which can easily bite right through a man's arm, bone and all.

Quite rarely, they display extraordinary courage, of which I once saw an example. I had been sitting over a panther kill. The owner turned up and began to eat. I had held my shot, as I wanted, if possible, to learn the sex of the animal before killing it. This was because I had been told a male and a female panther lived in the vicinity, and that the female was accompanied by two cubs about six months old. I wanted to make certain I did not shoot the mother.

While I hesitated, a hyaena had arrived on the scene, and his

arrival, on that occasion, had been dramatic. He came as if from nowhere, and the first I knew of his arrival was when he had scampered boldly up to the panther, voicing the same medley of sounds I have just described. The panther, sprawled across its kill, had glared at the newcomer with blazing orbs, snarling and growling furiously. The hyaena had approached to within five feet, just beyond reach of the panther's paw-sweep, and had set up such a cacophony of hideous sound as to resemble a chorus of the demons of hell.

The panther had added to the noise by growling still louder, and every now and then striking at the hyaena with its claws. The latter just rocked backwards, out of reach of each blow, after which it would feint with a short rush forward, while gradually working around to the rear of the panther. At first the panther had turned around correspondingly, to keep the hyaena in view, growling even more loudly while making short jabs and slaps with its paws in the direction of the hyaena. But the hyaena, always out of reach, had haw-ed and sneered, gargled and gurgled with unabated zeal.

Frightened—or perhaps just disgusted—at the unseemly racket, the panther had finally risen from its kill and then walked slowly away with many a backward glance, amidst snarls, at the hyaena, who continued his weird din till the panther had vanished in the undergrowth. Then he had fallen upon the kill himself, with the greatest—and, no doubt, thoroughly deserved—enthusiasm.

But the hyaena which I continued to watch from the rock was undoubtedly a little scared of the mongrel dog. Frequently he would disappear to one or the other side of the road. Then would come a pitter-patter amongst the dried leaves as he doubled back and forth, this way and that, to reappear at all places while continuing to make his unseemly, weird and often comical sounds.

The lesson I learnt from these two experiences was that hyaenas try to frighten their opponents with their continuous, unseemly crackle. The first hyaena had frightened the panther off its own kill while this one was trying to frighten the dog, perhaps just to clear it off the road or into the undergrowth, where he could pounce upon it more easily.

But the dog was tied up, and so could not move away, which the hyaena could not understand. An hour of this sort of thing ceased to be amusing to me, and I realised the racket, especially the part played by the hyaena, was almost certain to drive away any panther in the vicinity, man-eater or otherwise. So, groping for a small piece of rock, I hurled it at the hyaena. My aim fell short of its mark, and the stone thudded on the hard surface of the road. The hyaena jumped nervously, and scampered into the bushes, while the dog stopped barking and began to whimper. I thought I had rid the scene of a most

unwelcome visitor.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour had passed when I heard the furtive pitter-patter again, shortly followed by the hyaena's queer notes. The dog barked and growled. I threw another stone at the hyaena. He stopped; only to start again after ten minutes. Once more a stone; once more a silence, followed by a new beginning. Only after about the fifth stone did the hyaena feel that the spot had somehow become unhealthy, and with a final, 'Ah! Ah! Ah! Chee-ey! Shee-ay!' took himself off. It was past ten o'clock.

My watch showed five minutes to midnight when I heard the approach of human voices. A little later, I saw the twinkling lights of two lanterns, illuminating from that distance the walking feet of many men. The dog saw them and stopped its moaning.

When the party drew level with the dog, I counted eleven men, two of whom were carrying lanterns, and all of whom, except one, carried staves and lathis of some sort or another.

The one exception was armed with a matchlock. They had obviously come in search of me. I answered their call and came down from the rock.

The men then told me that, scarcely an hour earlier, the panther had made its way into one of the huts of the very village where the dog-keeper had been attacked by burrowing through the thatched wall, and had seized one of the five sleeping inmates, a woman about twenty-five years old. She had shrieked aloud as she found herself being dragged away, waking the other four persons in the room, who were her father, two brothers and mother.

Meanwhile, the panther was trying to drag her out through the opening in the thatch by which it had entered. The girl struggled violently. The panther dropped her and bit her viciously. One of the brothers struck a match to lighten the darkness of the hut's interior. Her father, with commendable bravery and presence of mind, hurled the only missile which came to his hand, at the panther. The missile happened to be a brass water-pot of some weight, and it struck the panther full on its side. Man-eaters, whether tigers or panthers, invariably have a streak of cowardice in their natures and this panther was no exception to the general rule. Leaving its victim, it had dashed out of the hut through the opening in the thatch.

The screams of the mauled woman and the general pandemonium had awakened the whole village. The menfolk came out with lanterns, armed as best as they could. The party of eleven had then come to the rest-house to find me, and the watchman from whom I had borrowed the dog had directed them to where I was sitting.

Telling one of the men to untie the rope and bring the dog in

tow, we hastened back to the bungalow, and I brought out my first-aid kit from the back seat of the Studebaker. We then hurried on to the village, where an appalling sight awaited me. The poor girl had been bitten right through her right shoulder, and again in the abdomen, where the panther had seized her the second time when she had struggled to escape. One breast and her chest right down the side were in ribbons where the foul claws had buried themselves deep in her flesh, raking it open with their downward sweep. Her jacket and sari were torn to pieces, and she lay in a welter of blood, blissfully unconscious after her experience.

I saw at once that such meagre first-aid equipment as I had was totally inadequate to meet the situation, but we quickly washed the wounds with strong solution of potassium permanganate and roughly bandaged her chest and abdomen with strips torn from another sari. Her father, two brothers, and three willing men from the village then carried her on a rope-cot to the Studebaker. Placing her as comfortably as possible in the 'dickie', I took her three male relations aboard and set out for the town of Kankanhalli, which boasted the nearest village hospital. We reached there after three-thirty in the morning, when I awoke the doctor and handed over the injured woman. Her condition appeared to be very low, owing to the great deal of blood she had lost.

By four-thirty, I was in the bathroom of the traveller's bungalow at Kankanhalli, where I removed my blood-soaked clothing and took a cold bath. I had no change of clothing with me, having left them behind at Sangam in the confusion of the moment. So I borrowed a clean *dhoti* and a blanket from the bungalow-waiter.

Dawn was breaking when I knocked at the Post Office, awoke a most obliging postmaster from his sleep, paid the necessary late fee and despatched an urgent telegram to Bangalore requesting extension of leave for four more days.

When I returned to the bungalow I found the younger brother of the injured woman awaiting me in tears. He had come from the hospital to tell me his sister had just died. Shortly afterwards, the father came to ask me to take his daughter's body back in the car to Sangam for cremation by the banks of the river Cauvery, in which the ashes would eventually be scattered. It was a request I could not refuse. The bungalow servant told me he wanted his *dhoti* and blanket back. So I had to dress again in my blood-smeared clothes.

We drove back to the hospital, placed the still, limp body of the girl in the back seat, and set out on the return journey to Sangam, delayed by two hours at the Police Station, where we reported the occurrence.

After a bath in a quiet pool beside the river, free from crocodiles,

a change into fresh clothing, a cold lunch and two big mugs of tea, I lay back in a rickety old armchair to review the situation. My loaded pipe, from which the comforting smoke arose in spirals to the roughly-tiled low roof, helped a great deal to soothe my ragged nerves after the events of the previous night and to prevent my eyes from closing with sleep.

What should I do with the remaining four days and five nights at my disposal, to rid these poor village-folk from another, and still another, and God only knew how many more repetitions of these terrible events. Facts appeared to indicate that: (1) the panther would not take animal baits, (2) it had a wide range of cover, and (3) it was predisposed to dragging people out of huts. Then, while I pondered, I fell asleep.

At 3 p.m. I awoke and a possible line of action appeared to have presented itself while I slept. It was this:

The small village of Sangam, with about a dozen huts, had been constructed in the usual fashion, on both sides of a central lane. I remembered that on the southern side of this lane, and not far from the river bank, small herds of cattle belonging to the villagers were corralled in a common enclosure, surrounded by a fence of bamboo, intersticed with cut lantana brambles. The only dogs left in the village, which had belonged to the man who had been killed, were enclosed in the shed-like room where he had been slain, which room happened to adjoin the larger cattle enclosure on its western side. The idea came to me that, if I posted myself at night in the midst of the cattle, not only would I be perfectly safe from unexpected attack, as the cattle would grow restive and give ample warning should the panther approach, but this very restlessness, and the fact that the dogs too would join in the alarm, would help me to learn of the panther's presence, should he enter the village. Meanwhile, I would keep my five live baits tied out on the off-chance that one of them might be taken instead.

With this plan in view, I dressed warmly for the night, wearing a khaki woollen 'balaclava' cap to keep off the dew. My usual night equipment included, this time a large flask of tea, some biscuits, and my pipe, as I knew that smoking, in this case, would do no harm.

Because of the panther's presence, the villagers were inside their huts, behind doors barricaded and reinforced with freshly-cut thorns, long before six o'clock. I took up my position in the middle of the cattle enclosure. About me was a space of about fifty yards in every direction, with nearly hundred nondescript cattle scattered around.

At fist the animals resented my presence and crowded to the corners away from me, leaving me isolated in the centre of the pen. I started trying to make friends with them. One kicked over my flask of

tea and nearly broke it! Moreover, some of the bulls were rather truculent and made short jabs at me with their horns if I came too close. After an hour in each other's company, the situation eased a little, and I was able to make my way guardedly to the centre of the herd, about half of whom were now resting on the ground. I got down also.

As the hours dragged by, the silence was unbroken, except for an occasional snort from one of the animals, or the trampling of another as it altered its position. One cow became friendly and insisted in nuzzling her muzzle against my chest as a gesture of companionship. Eventually she flopped down contentedly on the ground beside me.

Then cattle-ticks began to bite me in many places and mercilessly. I scratched myself vigorously, although I knew that by doing so I would only increase the irritation. It grew colder, and soon I was glad to nuzzle myself, in my turn, up against the warm body of the cow who had chosen to open this strange friendship with me. Now and again, one of the herd would 'moo' contentedly, or snort, or kick, or flop down to the ground, or struggle to its feet.

The hours still dragged by, and the ticks continued to bite. At one o'clock a sambar belled on the small hill to the north of the village. It was a doe that had called, and she called again and again. Then her call was taken up by a kakar, whose hoarse bark resounded across the *nullahs* which furrowed the lower slopes of the hillock.

The sambar doe had stopped belling by this time, while the kakar climbed up, giving occasional vent to his guttural call. Whatever it was that had alarmed them had come down the hill.

Some twenty minutes later spotted deer began their warning cries, answering one another from the jungle that slopes from the base of the hill to the edge of the river. Either a tiger or a panther was afoot, and the next few minutes would tell whether the carnivore was just a normal animal or the marauder I was awaiting.

It was almost pitch-dark when the cattle grew restless. With one accord, those lying on the ground scrambled to their feet, and I did the same, keeping close beside the friendly cow. Some of the bulls snorted, and the herd were all turned towards the lane that divided the small village and passed by the thorn hedge that bordered the cattle stockade.

The animals became very restless and began to gather in a mass at the further end of the stockade, away from the hedge and lane. The four dogs in the neighbouring shed had been barking furiously; they now began to whimper. Whatever had frightened them was passing down that lane at that very moment.

I had got myself wedged in the midst of the cattle and had to watch carefully against being impaled on one of the many horns that

were nervously tossing about me. I began to force myself through the herd to reach their front rank, hoping that I might be able to see something, but the darkness and the hedge revealed nothing.

I could hear the dogs howling and whimpering in the shed in which they were locked. My ears were attuned to catch the slightest sound, but the noise made by the cattle and the dogs gave me little chance. Some minutes later, I caught the faintest of scratching noises. Listening carefully 1 located it as coming from further down the lane. They became louder

and more impatient. Then I realised that the panther was scratching at a door of one of the huts some distance away.

Breaking through the remainder of the cattle, I approached the fence on tiptoe, hoping to be able to peep over it and catch a glimpse of the panther when I switched on the torch at the end of my rifle. The inmates of the hut at which the panther was scratching chose that very moment to set up a bedlam of shrieks and shouts; the silence was broken by the most frightful din.

Thinking that the man-eater had succeeded in forcing his way into the hut, I threw discretion to the winds and rushed for the bamboo-and-thorn door that formed the entrance of the stockade. At dusk I had firmly wedged a huge Y-shaped log into place, and it took some precious moments to release its base from the big stones against which I had jammed it.

Dragging it aside and switching on the torch, I heaved the clumsy door back and stepped into the lane. Nothing was to be seen in any direction.

Keeping my back to the thorn fence to guard against attack from the rear, I shone the beam in all directions, but I still saw nothing. The panther had disappeared into thin air. Meanwhile, the shrieks and shouts continued unabated.

Then it occurred to me that perhaps the panther was inside the hut all this time, mauling and killing the inmates, and with this alarming thought in mind I began carefully to cover the intervening twenty yards.

When I came abreast of the entrance, I found it was shut fast. I called out to the inmates. At first, due to the noise they were making, they could not hear me. Then I called again, louder and many times. The the hubbub gradually subsided.

I shouted to the occupants to open the door. They would not do so. Then a tremendous voice from inside asked whether I was a man or a devil. I called back that it was I, and that the panther had gone. The voice replied that the inmates would open the door only when morning came. Meanwhile, my torch beam clearly showed the fresh claw-marks on the door of the hut, where the panther had just tried to

effect an entrance.

I returned to the stockade, reclosed the door, replaced the Y-shaped log and the stones and went back to the spot where I had been lying against the cow when the alarm had begun.

To my horror, I found that the milling feet of the herd had smashed my thermos and it was now impossible to drink the hot tea for which I longed. My biscuits also had been devoured, and as I watched her ruefully, the friendly cow devoured the last of the paper in which they had been wrapped. Fortunately, I had kept my pipe and tobacco in my pocket, and with this I spent the rest of the night in comparative comfort, once again nestling against the side of the cow.

I returned to the bungalow at dawn, tired and disappointed. Worst of all, my body was a mass of tick-bites and itched abominably. Further, I knew only too well that each bite would fester during the coming ten days, and that I was in for a most uncomfortable time.

A cold bath and change, followed by hot tea, tinned bacon and bread and butter helped to ease my gloom, and by 7.30 a.m. I was asleep. I awoke for lunch at midday, and slept again till 3 p.m. Then I got up and began to work out another plan.

It would be impossible to sit with the cattle again, for if I was to get bitten once more by as many ticks as in the previous night, I might end with a dose of tick fever. Yet it was undeniable that both the cattle and the dogs had helped admirably in giving me the alarm when the panther had passed down the lane.

At last I had a fresh idea, that appeared to be the only compromise in the situation. The roof of the dog-shed consisted of scraps of zinc sheeting. I decided that I would lie on that roof, suitably camouflaged and overlooking the lane, so that I should be able to shoot the panther if it walked down the lane again. The cattle and the dogs would still help me by giving the alarm. I could protect my rear and both flanks by heaping stacks of cut thorns on to the roof. Any heavy body, like the panther, that leapt upon the zinc roof would necessarily give its presence away by the noise that would follow. Not only did this appear to be the only solution, but actually a good solution of the problem.

So I hurried towards the village, carrying my night-kit, biscuits, tea (poured into an empty beer bottle, borrowed from the bungalow watchman). After telling the villagers of my new plan, willing hands soon stacked piles of cut thorn branches on to the zinc roof of the goat-shed in the form of a square. Others brought dried straw, which they placed on the roof within the square of thorns for me to lie on.

At 6 p.m. I took up my position. There were two disadvantages that almost immediately began to show themselves: the first, that having to face the lane all the time, I would have to lie so that my legs

would be slightly higher than my head, for the zinc roof sloped slightly downwards from back to front, to allow rain-water to flow off easily; the second, that I would have to remain lying on my stomach for most of the time, since my slightest movement sounded distinctly on the zinc roof. But the advantages were that I was safe from surprise attack from the rear; that I had a clear and unobstructed view of the lane and could hear distinctly, particularly if the cattle or the dogs became uneasy; lastly, that I was away from those awful ticks.

But that night was a peaceful one, without any indication whatever that the panther had come within two or three miles of the village. Back at the bungalow next morning I had another bath, and another daylong sleep. Each day I had had my live baits checked by a group of men, but none of these beasts had been harmed.

That night I took up position on the roof once more. It was past 2 a.m., and there had been no alarms from the surrounding jungle, and I felt very drowsy. Suddenly, as in a dream, I heard the cattle begin to stir restlessly. One of the dogs in the shed beneath me growled. Then all four of them began to bark or howl together.

Peering forward slowly, I began to scan the village lane in both directions. Starlight was not good at that moment, only enough to prevent the night from being obscure. The lane to the right and left appeared as a faint blur and of a slightly lighter shade than the surroundings. I could hear nothing and see nothing.

Then I caught the faintest of sounds. It appeared to be a hiss such as a cobra might make. Yes, there it was again! And it came from in front and directly below me. Was it the hiss of a snake or the faint noise a panther makes when he curls back the skin of his upper lip?

I peered downwards and at first could see nothing. Seconds later a faint elongated shape registered itself on my vision in that difficult light, a smudge of an infinitesimally lighter shade than the surrounding blur of the lane. I stared at it, and thought I saw it move. The hiss was repeated more distinctly this time. It appeared to come from this lighter smudge. The dogs inside the shed below me now started to whine and whimper. The cattle were very restless.

I realised that I could not point my rifle downwards from where I lay, I would have to move forward another foot perhaps, till my head and shoulders completely cleared the edge of zinc sheet on which I was lying. I began to do this, but despite my utmost care, the straw rustled and the zinc creaked faintly.

There came an ominous growl from that lightish smudge, and I knew that I was discovered and that within the next few seconds the panther would probably jump on the zinc roof and on to me.

Kicking myself forward the remaining six inches, I lowered the rifle over the side of the roof and depressed the torch-switch. Two

gleaming orbs reflected the light from a spotted body, crouched for the spring. Only a single shot was required at that point-blank range and the spark of life slowly faded from those blazing orbs: from fiery white they became a dull orange, then a faint green, then an empty glimmer, and finally a purplish blue as the light was reflected back by the now lifeless retina.

It was an old female that I saw next morning, with canine teeth worn down almost to their stubs. Her coat was extremely pale; even her rosettes were ill-formed and dull. Her claws were blunt and worn. There appeared to be no other signs of deformity of any sort about her, or indication of an earlier wound. It seemed that only old age, and the prospect of gradual starvation through her physical incapacity to kill animals, had caused the Sangam panther to make war on the human race—a war which, however ghastly and fearsome while it lasts, invariably ends in the death of the feline. Modern firearms and the human intellect are heavy odds against the jungle instinct, cunning and pangs of hunger.

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1 In *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue,* George Allen and Unwin, 1954.

Six

The Ramapuram Tiger

This is the story of a tiger that for three months held sway over nearly half a district, an area some sixty miles long by another sixty or so broad. Although his reign was comparatively short, it was nevertheless hectic, for during this short time the Ramapuram tiger was literally here, there and everywhere within the 3,600 square miles of his domain. Like the Scarlet Pimpernel he was sought by all, yet found by none, till his end came in an unexpected manner.

The district of North Coimbatore is largely made up of hills and forest. Bounded on the south by the low-lying plains of Coimbatore proper, it rises abruptly to the Dimbum escarpment. On the southwest are the jungles of the Nilgiri or Blue Mountain range. On the west, the forests of Mysore. To the northwest is another high range of hills—the Biligirirangans. North, northeast and eastwards flows the Cauvery river, clothed on both its banks with heavy jungle, the northeastern and eastern portions abutting on the forests of the district of Salem.

There is only one town worthy of that name in the district of North Coimbatore: Kollegal, which lies at the northwestern corner, scarcely eight miles from the Cauvery. Four roads branch out of Kollegal. Those that run westwards and northwards into Mysore play no part in this story. The third leads southwards and is more or less straight and runs along the eastern base of the Biligirirangan hills. Seventeen miles along this road brings one to the large village of Lokkanhalli; thirteen miles beyond Lokkanhalli is Bailur, where the 'Bison Range' begins and reaches to Hasanpur at the forty-eighth milestone, and to Dimbum, at the top of the escarpment, fifty-two miles from Kollegal.

The fourth road leads in a southeasterly direction and cuts through the village of Ramapuram, about twenty-five miles from Kollegal, where it turns southwards and leads to Bargur, twenty-four miles further on, then to Tamarakarai, another five miles, and finally to the southeastern end of the Dimbum escarpment, where it drops sharply to the village of Andiyur on the plains. This road totals about eighty-one miles in length.

The Kollegal-Lokkanhalli-Bailur-Dimbum road carried sparse lorry traffic and a daily bus service; whereas the road to Ramapuram, Tamarakari and Andiyur was unfit for motor traffic, except jeeps or old-fashioned high-clearance American cars, over the last sixty miles of its length. The terrain is fearful, consisting of sharp rising and

falling gradients strewn with boulders. It becomes a narrow track, cut deeply by the wheels of bullock-carts and hemmed in on both sides by dense forest. The sandy—and often rocky-beds of forest streams cross and recross this track at intervals. In the deeper valleys vast areas of the mighty bamboo prevail, the drooping stems touching the hood of the car as it labours and chugs along in low gear with its radiator invariably boiling. Occasionally a fallen bamboo stem, or the broken branch of a tree, lies across the track, torn down to appease the ravenous appetite of an elephant. The driver then halts, and with his axe, or 'chopper' as it is here called, cuts away the obstruction and drags it aside, then moves on until he meets another similar obstruction. Without the handy 'chopper', this track would be impassable.

Tigers normally dislike very dense vegetation, and keep to low scrub jungle, but it is preferred by elephants and bison. The tiger has various reasons for its preference, one being that almost impenetrable undergrowth prevents the tiger from carefully stalking his prey and hinders his terribly effective last-minute charge. Another reason is that the tiger's legitimate prey — deer of all kinds, wild pig and, of course, village cattle — do not enter very dense jungle, which is mainly inhabited by elephants and bison of which the tiger generally keeps clear. A third reason is that thick undergrowth harbours insect pests, such as leeches, many species of animal-ticks, and the horse or animal fly, as it is called in India; tigers have a great aversion to these pests.

The Ramapuram man-eater was reported to have come from the banks of the Cauvery river, from the region of a mountain known as Ponnachai Malai, over six thousand feet in altitude. A few minor coffee-estates, owned by Sholagas and other Indian planters, exist on the slopes of this mountain. It is said that the Ramapuram man-eater began his career as an ordinary cattle-lifter that made a habit of raiding these estates for what he could pick up in the way of domestic cattle belonging to the planters and the coolies. He is reported to. have killed and eaten several cattle, till one planter, more enterprising than his fellows, went down to Coimbatore city and purchased a gin-trap of truly formidable appearance.

This trap was made of iron with two semicircular rows of teeth, which when opened and held apart, had a spread of almost two-and-a-half feet. The teeth were about two inches long. The jaws were kept apart by a hair-trigger arrangement, which, when released, allowed an exceptionally powerful spring to bring the jaws noisily together at lightning speed, so that the wicked teeth meshed with each other.

Soon afterwards, the tiger killed a milch-cow which it dragged into a ravine and concealed beneath a heap of dried leaves, without starting to feed. The kill was followed and discovered, and the trap

was carefully set near the hindquarters of the cow, at which place the tiger would normally start operations when he returned for his meal. The same dried leaves that concealed the kill were used to hide the trap. The tiger returned, and to his bad luck and the future ill-fortune of others—got his head in the trap, which caught him firmly on both sides of the neck, just behind the ears.

The trap had been anchored to the ground with a stake. The tiger tore at the trap and succeeded in uprooting the stake, while the jaws held firm in his neck. He then rushed away into the jungle, dragging the heavy trap with him, till at a spot almost two miles distant the trap got itself firmly wedged between two big rocks. The tiger tried to drag itself free, but only succeeded in wedging the trap more firmly than before.

The tiger roared with pain, and struggled desperately. The roars were heard for half the night by the planter and his frightened coolies, two miles away at their plantation. Finally, the animal broke loose losing its left ear and eye in the process, with very severe injuries to the rest of the neck and face. It was heard in the area moaning with pain night and day for quite a week afterwards.

Then came a period of absolute silence. Everyone thought the tiger had died of its wounds. The planter and his hirelings kept a careful watch for vultures, who would doubtless spot the carcase and betray the whereabouts of the dead animal by swooping to earth for their meal. But the only vultures seen were those soaring in the high heavens, carefully scanning the earth below for the signs of death; but none swooped, for the very good reason that the tiger was not dead.

A fortnight passed; then one afternoon, along the *path* to one of the smaller coffee-estates, climbed Jeyken, a Sholaga, and his eighteen-year-old spouse. In accordance with the established Indian custom, Jeyken walked in front, with the woman about a yard behind him, carrying a sack of grain balanced on her head. They had crossed a dry streambed, and were just climbing its slight embankment, when, out of a clump of grass like sugarcane that grows only along river banks in these areas, a tiger pounced upon the girl, throwing her to the earth.

Turning, Jeyken saw his wife lying on the ground gazing at him with terror-stricken, pleading eyes. The tiger crouched upon her back, its two paws overlapping her shoulders, the wide-open mouth just above her head. It was a tiger with no left eye, and no left ear, while the wounds on its neck and face had not yet healed!

Jeyken was turned to stone. He could not move and he could not speak, but remained rooted to the spot in horror and amazement. The tiger snarled horribly, contorting its already lacerated features into a still more horrible mask. Then it grabbed the girl by her right shoulder

and walked across the stream with its prey—the girl hung head downwards, her loose hair and left arm and legs dragging in the sand. A moment later, the tiger and the girl had disappeared in the jungle on the further side.

Evidentally the poor woman had swooned, or may already have died of fright. That was the last Jeyken ever saw of his wife, nor had she uttered the slightest cry, even at the moment of attack.

A month later a herd-boy was killed by a tiger within two miles of Ramapuram. In this case the half-eaten remains were found in a bush. The third human kill occurred about three weeks later, almost at the twenty-first milestone on the Kollegal-Lokkanhalli-Bailur-Dimbum road. This time it was a road-coolie, a middle-aged woman, who was attacked in full view of her companions just before five in the evening. She had stopped work for a few minutes, and had gone some yards into the jungle, when a tiger pounced upon her as if from nowhere and carried her away. She had screamed frenziedly, and those who were in the vicinity had clearly seen the tiger. It had a scarred face and no left ear or eye!

It so happened that my game licence for the North Coimbatore area had at that time expired. This area is divided into two forest divisions: North Coimbatore proper and the Kollegal Division. For although Kollegal fell within North Coimbatore district for administrative purposes, the Forest Department had recently subdivided the district into two distinct Forest Divisions. My licence, which had expired, covered North Coimbatore proper and Dimbum; while Lokkanhalli, Bailure and Ramapuram fell within the Kollegal Division. I had intended renewing my old licence, and was about to send the required fee when I read in the papers about the latest outrage committed by this tiger. That decided me, and with ten days' privilege leave at my disposal, I left Bangalore early in the morning, reaching the Forest Department office at Kollegal, eighty-seven miles away, even before it had opened for the day. It did not take me long to get the required shooting licence, and all available information regarding the tiger.

The area where the man-eater had operated was comparatively new to me, so I decided, for a start, to camp in the small forest lodge at Ramapuram, twenty-five miles away, which I reached in an hour and a half, after negotiating an extremely bumpy road.

Obviously, the first thing to do was to try and win the confidence of the inhabitants of Ramapuram by telling them I had come to try to rid them of the tiger. The people did not know me and gave somewhat garbled accounts, indicating that the tiger might be anywhere between Ponnachai Malai, where it had struck down it first victim, and Bailur, a distance of about sixty miles as the crow flies.

Bailur, as I have told you, was a small village some thirty miles from Kollegal, on the Kollegal-Lokkanhalli-Dimbum road. Thus, I could either return to Kollegal by car and motor thence to Bailur, or I could leave the car at Ramapuram and cover the third side of the triangle by walking from Ramapuram to Bailur, a distance of nearly nineteen miles. I decided to follow the latter course, as it would give me the opportunity of passing through several Forest hamlets bordering the Reserved Forest, where I hoped to get some news of the tiger.

Accordingly, at dawn next morning I left the little Forest Lodge at Ramapuram and began my walk to Bailur. The path led in a generally southwesterly direction, alternatively through sparsely cultivated country and scrub jungle, which skirted the ranges of small hills lying a couple of miles southward, within the boundaries of the Reserved Forest proper.

I passed a few hamlets, but all the inhabitants were either indoors or squatting at the entrances of their huts. Their few cattle were kraaled outside or grazed at will on the scant herbage in the immediate vicinity of the huts, for the story of the man-eater had spread far and wide and the usual scare that attends such visitations had already set in.

I walked slowly making inquiries wherever possible. Almost all the Sholagas inhabiting these hamlets reported that they had heard a tiger roaring in the vicinity, either the previous night or within the past seventy-two hours. At one spot I was shown the clear pug-marks of a tiger as it had crossed a recently ploughed field, just a hundred yards from the owner's hut. I took detailed measurements of those pugs for future reference before moving on but it soon became evident that the people in this area were either so nervous that they were making completely false and exaggerated reports, or else that an unusual number of tigers were operating along the nineteen miles between Ramapuram and Bailur. For, according to the information obtained, a tiger appeared to have visited each hamlet within the last three or four days!

At about 5 p.m. I approached Bailur, a village of some twenty huts. Here I met members of the road gang who had witnessed the killing of the woman near the twenty-first milestone. They told me what I have already recorded and particularly stressed the tiger's deformities, which they had all clearly seen while they stood rooted to the spot with terror, while the tiger made off into the undergrowth with its still-screaming victim, the road-coolie woman.

The nearest Forest department Lodge was some three-and-a-half miles farther along the motor-road in the direction of Dimbum. The Reserve lay along both sides of the road. It was now 5.30 p.m., and I

knew that night would fall in an hour, so I covered those last three-and-a-half miles at a brisk pace, reaching the little Forest Bungalow shortly before dark.

The sun had gone down behind the towering range of the Biligirirangan Hills, which lay some three miles west of the bungalow, and the twilight calls of roosting peacock and junglefowl welcomed me as I sank into an old broken armchair which I dragged on to the verandah. The distant challenge of a sambar stag, descending the western range, was music to my ears as it floated across the dense valley separating the bungalow from the foothills. The myriad tree-tops of this valley were like a dark carpet in the deepening twilight.

Scarcely half-an-hour had passed before total darkness prevailed, punctuated by the incessant flicker of a million fireflies. They floated everywhere, like tiny elfin spirits in the gloom, carrying their lanterns of pinpoint brilliance to every bush tree-top in the vicinity. At rare intervals their flashes would synchronise, and the tree or bush around which they clustered would throb and pulsate to one big and unanimous flash of light, made by thousands of these little creatures. The blackness of the jungle night would disperse before a phosphorescent and ethereal glow—but only for a moment— until that rare interval of synchronisation occurred again.

I made an early night of it, sleeping on the floor of the small central room of the lodge; but at about 2 a.m., the moaning call of a tiger woke me. I heard it call at intervals as it traversed the valley, until it died away in the distance.

Early morning found me back in Bailur village, where I enlisted the help of two local *shikaris* and purchased three young bulls for bait. One of these we tethered in the bed of the stream that traversed the valley west of the bungalow, where I had heard the tiger calling in the night. The second was tied in a small forest-glade a bare 100 yards from the roadside, midway between the village and the Forest Bungalow. To tie the third, we walked back to the twenty-first milestone, where the road-worker had been killed. Close to this spot the road was crossed by a forest stream, known as Oddam Betta Halla; its banks were clothed with bamboo, except for a small clearing made by the Forest department, in which seedlings of various forest plants were being experimentally grown. My helpers told me that a tiger often walked through this clearing, and I found this statement to be true, in that pug-marks both old and comparatively new were visible at three different place. I examined the most recent of these imprints, and compared them with the measurements of the pug-marks taken at the hamlet on the previous day. Both sets had been made by a male tiger, but those in the departmental plantation belonged to a much older and heavier animal.

We tied the third bait on open ground just where the Oddam Betta Halla stream flows past this plantation.

When all this had been done it was 5.30 p.m., and on our return to Bailur village I was approached by a sturdy, good-looking Sholaga, who introduced himself as Jeyken, the husband of the girl who had been the man-eater's first victim. He said that a party of travellers who had passed by the coffee estate on the slopes of Ponnachai Malai, where he worked, had informed him that a *Sahib* had come to Ramapuram to shoot the tiger. Filled with the idea of revenge for his wife's murder, he had obtained the planter's permission to go to Ramapuram to offer me his assistance. At Ramapuram he was told that I had gone to Bailur, whither he had immediately followed me, all by himself.

I thanked Jeyken for his offer, and the trouble he had taken to find me, and immediately recruited him as my personal helper. I liked his appearance and his calm determination to leave no stone unturned to bring the tiger to book. Jeyken smiled at my acceptance and thanked me in turn, but he staunchly refused to accept any payment; indeed, he made it abundantly clear that this was the condition of his offer.

I returned to the Forest Lodge, instructing Jeyken and the other two helpers to make an early start next morning and visit the bait near the twenty-first milestone. For myself, I would visit the other two baits. This I did next morning, first visiting the bull tethered on the streambed in the valley, then the bait that was tied midway between the Forest bungalow and Bailur village. Both were unharmed and no traces of pugs were to be seen in any sand that existed near the spots where they were tied. I then walked the remaining distance to Bailur village, where I awaited the return of my three scouts; within an hour they arrived, to tell me the third bait was alive.

Leaving Jeyken and one of the Sholagas at the village, I took the second man, who claimed to be well acquainted with the forest gamepaths in that area, and walked westwards till we entered the foothills of the Biligirirangans. As all this area was unfamiliar to me, I got him to walk in front, while I covered him from the rear with my rifle ready in my hands. Sholagas are born jungle folk, and my guide showed no signs of nervousness while we threaded our way thus, in single file, up one game-path and down another, across dark *nullahs,* often bending double to avoid overhanging fronds of bamboo or outcrops of wait-a-bit thorn. But no signs of a fresh tiger track did we see.

A large male panther had crossed at one spot, and at another spot a female, accompanied by her cub; but it was evident that the tiger we were looking for had not passed that way.

It was nearing 3 p.m. before we got back to the Forest Lodge and a late cold lunch. The Sholaga made a fire, on which I boiled some water to brew us several cups of tea. Then I drew water from the little well in the compound, to give myself the luxury of a cold bath.

At five I returned with the Sholaga to Bailur village, where I left him with instructions for Jeyken, himself and the third Sholaga to visit the bait on the twenty-first milestone early next morning. It was well past seven by the time I got back to the bungalow. I slept soundly that night, nor did the moaning call of any tiger disturb me. Early morning found me on my way to visit the other two baits. Both were unharmed.

Returning to the Forest Lodge, I ate a frugal meal and then walked towards Bailur, carefully watching the road for pug-marks. No tiger had passed that way and 9.15 a.m. found me awaiting my henchmen. They returned before ten, this time to report that the bait had been killed and removed by a tiger, which had contrived to bite through the tethering rope.

Fortunately I had come prepared for such an eventuality and had brought my torch and other night-shooting kit with me in a haversack. Back we went as fast as we could, and shortly after midday had reached the spot where the bull had been tied. The tiger's pug-marks, in approaching the bait, were apparent in the soft earth some twenty feet away, and an examination showed that the killer was a tigress and not a tiger. From there she had launched her final attack that had killed the bull, biting through the rope by which its leg had been tied.

We could not know how far the kill had been taken, so I told my companions to wait for me by the twenty-first milestone till 3 p.m., while I would follow the drag-mark. If the dead bull had been taken for some distance, I would try to build myself a hide-out to await the return of the tigress, and would make it an all-night affair. Under such circumstances, I would not be back by three and they were to return to Bailur. On the other hand, if the tigress had dropped the kill not far away, I would return to my companions and get them to put up a proper *machan*.

I found the tigress had half-dragged the kill for the first two hundred yards, by which time she had got clear of the bamboo jungle that grew on the lower land and in the vicinity of the stream. Then she had encountered some heavy lantana undergrowth, which had obviously been an obstruction to her passage, encumbered as she was with the dead bull. Here she had evidently slung it over her shoulder, as tigers sometimes do to carry their kills, and it then became extremely difficult to follow the trail.

A dragging hoof, or the horns of the bull, had here and there broken a twig, and these were the only visible signs of passage. The

carpet of rotting vegetation, and fallen lantana leaves, effectively did away with any hope of finding pug-marks. Necessarily, the going was also very slow, nor did I like the situation at all, as almost my whole attention had to be given to following the trail, which prevented me from being fully on my guard against a sudden attack. Finally the lantana gave way to more open forest, sprinkled liberally with trees and a carpet of the dwarf date palm.

Twice I came across the spot where the tigress had laid down her burden and then picked it up again. It was now evident that she had some particular destination in view, most probably a lair where she had cubs to whom she was taking the meat.

Up and up led the trail; the terrain became more and more rocky, till finally, in a break among the tree-trunks, I saw a hillock, perhaps a quarter-of-a-mile beyond and about 200 feet above the spot where I stood. The trail led directly toward the hillock. By now I felt reasonably certain that the animal I was following was not the man-eater, because all the data gathered about the man-eater had classed it as a tiger and not a tigress, although the sex factor was not an established certainty. As it was a known fact, however, that the man-eater had lost its left eye and ear, if I could but catch a glimpse of the animal I was following, I would soon know whether it was the right one or not.

How to catch that glimpse was the problem. The obvious answer to it was to keep advancing till we met, but it was scarcely to my liking, as even if the tigress was not the man-eater, she certainly was unlikely to welcome any human being who knocked at the door of the lair where she had her cubs.

But I went forward. The trail was now easier to follow, as the tigress had brushed against boulders and rocks, where smears of blood betrayed the passage of the dead bull.

Half the distance was covered now; the other half would bring me to the summit. The boulders lay in heaps, and the trail I was following wound in and out between them, as the tigress picked her path to avoid any part of her burden becoming jammed between the rocks. It was ten minutes to three; the sun beat down mercilessly on the bare rocks, which in turn threw the heat back in my face as from the door of a furnace. My clothes were soaked with perspiration, which ran in rivers down my face, getting into my eyes, which burned and smarted, and into the corners of my mouth. I licked my lips and I remember that almost unconsciously, in the excitement of the moment, I noted the salty taste.

My rubber boots made no sound as I negotiated the heated rocks. One corner after another was turned, and at each turn I knew what lay beyond. Then I came upon a shelving rock which met the rising

ground at an angle of perhaps three hundred forming a shallow recess rather than a real cave. Two large balls of russet brown, striped with black, white underneath, were tumbling over one another in a vigorous game of 'catch-as-catch-can'. They were two tiger cubs, and they were playing!

I stopped in my tracks; the only movement being an imperceptible cocking of the rifle, with the faintest of clicks. But it was enough! Although they were only cubs, generations of instinct were behind them. They stopped playing, disentangled themselves, and looked at me in alarm.

Even now, I can picture the scene: one cub with a look of innocent surprise, and the other with its features wrinkled to emit a hiss of consternation.

That hiss was the signal for all hell to break loose, for it awoke the tigress, who was sleeping. With a series of shattering roars she dashed out of the cavern, vaulted over the cubs and came straight at me.

The distance may have been twenty yards. I covered her between the eyes as she advanced. Then five yards away she stopped; she crouched with her belly to ground, eyes blazing and mouth wide, while her roars and snarls shook the very ground on which I stood. She was a perfect specimen but certainly not the man-eater!

Wonder of wonders, she had not charged home. Her courage had failed her at the last moment. She was telling me, in the simplest of languages: 'Get out quickly, and don't harm my cubs or I will kill you.'

I was glad to oblige. Step by step, I retreated backwards, while never removing my eyes from hers, never allowing the rifle sights to waver in the slightest, my forefinger still on the trigger.

And she remained where she was! It was as if she understood that I was going. I realised at that moment that she did not want to harm me; that she was only protecting her cubs. Perhaps she was afraid. I was afraid too! But I did not want to harm her, nor destroy that lovely happy little family.

So I continued to retreat backwards. The tigress continued to roar. Now I had turned the corner of the first rock that hid her from view. Only then did I dare to take a hasty glance backwards, to see where I was walking, although I still faced towards the tigress, who had now stopped roaring, but was still growling. I knew that, as long as she continued to make those sounds I was safe; I would know where she was.

Another big boulder was passed; then I turned and beat a hasty retreat before she had time to change her mind and come after me. She stopped growling, and I knew that the real danger had come. She might have gone back to her cubs, or she might be following. I made

down the hill as rapidly as possible, glancing frequently behind me. Soon I came to the trees and the date palms, then the lantana belt, up which I had so laboriously followed the trail, and finally to the bamboos and the road.

It was 4.30 p.m. and as instructed, my companions had returned to Bailur. I had nine miles to cover, and only two hours before darkness fell. Nevertheless, I sat by the roadside for five minutes to enjoy a quick smoke. I felt I deserved it. I was thankful, too, that I had not been forced to shoot the tigress, for the sight of those two cubs was still fresh in my memory.

It was past six-thirty before I reached Bailur village. There my three companions awaited me, eager to hear my story. When I had told it, they agreed that it was unusual for a tigress to have failed to press home her charge.

Darkness had set in by the time I left the little village on the last lap of my journey to the forest bungalow. But as one of our baits was tied at a point about half-way between the village and the bungalow in a glade not far from the road, it occurred to me that I would pay it a visit. Why this idea came to me, I cannot tell particularly as I had already looked at it that morning on my way to Bailur. It was an impulse, and I have spent my life responding to impulses. I turned off along the little footpath that led away from the road towards the clearing where the bait was tied. It was quite dark, except for the diffused glow from the stars that shone brightly in a clear blue-black sky. The bushes around me assumed ghostly shapes, and the wind sighed fitfully among the branches of the 'rain-tree' that bordered the road. Now and again, a large teak-leaf fluttered to the ground with the softest of sounds, like some huge moth of the night settling down to rest.

I came up to the small wild-fig tree beneath which my bait was tied. The shadows were deeper there, and the bait was, moreover, a brown one. I could not see it till I came very close, when it lumbered to its feet, as if startled at my approach, even as I was startled by its sudden action. It was still unharmed. I walked around it to the other side, to inspect the rope that held it by the hind leg, in case it had become twisted.

And at that moment the man-eater charged.

It was fortunate for me that I had moved to the other side of the bull, which consequently came between me and the tiger. But I confess that I was taken totally by surprise.

There was tremendous ' *Woof* from the jungle from which I had just emerged. The bull swung round. I leaped behind it, with my back to the trunk of the fig tree almost tripping over the tethering rope. A huge grey shape vaulted on to the back of the bull, which collapsed

beneath the sudden weight.

But the tiger had not seized the neck or throat. It had simply leaped upon the bull in order to reach me beyond it. Luckily, in falling the bull ruined the tiger's spring, which otherwise would have followed within a split second.

The tiger was extricating itself from the heaving body of the fallen bull when my bullet smashed between its eyes. Convulsively it twisted backwards, still lying across the bull, which now staggered to its feet with the tiger over its back, the head and forequarters sagging forwards.

Automatically, and without thinking, I fired my second shot at a spot which I judged to be behind the tiger's left shoulder. The bull collapsed! The tiger rolled off the bull and towards me, as my third shot took it in the throat.

The bull never moved. The tiger kicked convulsively. And then at last all was still.

The light from the torch on the rifle revealed that my first bullet had smashed the tiger's skull. My second had been too low. The heavy .405 missile had ploughed through the end of the tiger's chest and blown a tremendous hole in the bull's side. My third bullet, a quite unnecessary one, had passed through the tiger's throat, leaving a gaping hole. But I had killed the poor bull that had unwittingly saved my life.

My hands were trembling, my knees wobbled, and suddenly I felt very, very sick. The reaction, after the events of that evening, was sudden. I sat on the ground, with may back to the fig tree, and raised my hand to my forehead, which I was surprised to find icy cold to my touch.

How long I remained thus I do not know. Then I groped for my pipe, filled and lit it. The first few puffs steadied my badly-shaken nerves and I was soon able to get back to the road and retrace my steps to Bailur Village.

I found the inhabitants gathered in the streets, agog with excitement and anticipation. For the surrounding hills had carried the sound of my three shots, which had reverberated across the valleys and stony ridges. They had guessed I had been attacked on the way to the bungalow, but were wondering whether it had been by the man-eater, or some bear or elephant.

Seeing me emerge from the gloom, they rushed forward to welcome me, my three servants well to the fore. I sat down by the roadside and told them the story. Gasps of amazement and incredulity broke from their lips, to be followed by congratulations and a fervent expression of thanks for my safety.

A 'chattie' of fresh hot milk was set before me, and a bunch of

bananas. As gifts go, it was not much, but it conveyed the heartfelt thanks of the villagers.

In another half-hour practically the whole village had assembled with lanterns and kerosene torches, a stout pole and coils of rope, to bring in the tiger. Back we went to the spot and over fifty people surveyed the strange scene, their eyes wide open with amazement. Jeyken was especially pathetic to watch. With his knife he started to stab the dead tiger— to my dismay, for he was doing further damage to a skin already well-nigh ruined by my bullets. Gently, but firmly, I drew him off; then he began to weep unrestrainedly, thinking of his dead wife.

The deep-hearted weeping of a strong and brave man is not pleasant to witness; it is infectious, and I felt a strange lump rising in my own throat—a lump which refused to subside for quite a time.

Not much remains to be told, except for a strange sequel. Next morning, when coming to the bungalow, Jeyken passed the spot where I had left the road the previous night. Fifty yards further on he decided to answer a call of nature and stepped behind a star-plum bush for the purpose. There he discovered for the first time that the tiger had been lying in wait for me the previous night; evidently it had been in the vicinity, and had either seen or heard me approaching along the road.

Jeyken told me what he had discovered, and I walked back with him to check it for myself. I found what he said was true. There clearly impressed on the soft sand, were tiger's pug-marks while the soft grass and rank weeds beneath the star-plum bush were still partly flattened by the weight of the tiger's body, although more than twelve hours had passed since he had lain there in ambush, awaiting my approach.

Yet some people tell me that there is no such thing as Providence, a guiding-spirit, intuition, or a sixth sense; call it what you will. I find it more difficult to understand the disbelievers than understand Providence itself!

Seven

The Great Panther of Mudiyanoor

Mudiyanoor is the name of a small village nestling near the southeastern end of a fertile valley that lies north of the Moyar river and the frowning crags of the Blue Mountains or Nilgiri range, and south of the foothills of the smaller mountain chain known as the Biligirirangans.

This little valley comes as near as possible on this troubled earth to the elusive 'happy valleys' of fiction, or of which we dream during our restless slumbers. Certain it is that rainfall is assured, even in a season of weak monsoons, due to the abutting mountain ranges at either end. The earth is very fertile, being particularly rich in leaf-mould and a fine red loam, for it was until recent years part of the primeval forest which is slowly, but ever steadily, being pushed back by the inroads of civilisation. The climate is temperate during the days and rather chilly at night, due to the cool breezes that blow down the mountain ridges.

Most of the people of Mudiyanoor are farmers, although a few are cattle-grazers, who maintain vast herds of animals which are driven during daylight into the surrounding forest for grazing. The milk from these animals is entirely used in the manufacture of 'ghee' which is simply melted butter, and is employed for cooking throughout India. Kerosene tins, filled with this stuff, are sent up the ghat, as the winding cart-track up the hillside is called, till it meets the main road from Mysore to Satyamangalam at the little hamlet of Dimbum. There the tins of ghee are loaded on to cart—and sometimes lorries—and taken away for sale. There are good markets for it in Mysore and Satyamangalam, and particularly in the more distant town of Gobichettipalayam.

So the population is happy and prosperous. Few strangers visit the valley, because the cart-track is practically unmotorable.

The herds occasionally suffer from a marauding tiger or panther: at other times the farmers awake to find sections of their fields trampled flat by elephants which have fed there during the night. Wild pigs and deer take a moderate toll of crops, but these are considered minor calamities and are accepted as the dictates of inevitable fate.

The 'great panther' earned that name because he was quite outstandingly large. He was suspected of having come from the fastnesses of the Blue Mountains, perhaps from Anaikutty or Segur,

and across the Moyar river, or Mysore Ditch as it is more commonly called. He began his depredations on the village cattle, killing in true tiger style by breaking the neck, and was therefore mistaken for that animal for some time.

Then, with increasing boldness, this panther started to harry the herds of fine milch cows that were part of my friend Hughie Hailstone's estate. This estate, the Moyar Valley Ranch, is an outstanding farm which is natural, for its owner is an outstanding character. A brilliant engineer by profession, he has the quick brain of an inventor—quick at thinking and quick at assessing values—and from his cleverness have originated many devices and mechanical improvements. In addition, Hughie is a born *shikari*. He loves the forest and its animals, and he is never happier than when handling, or tinkering with, a firearm. From this rare combination of mechanical genius and a love of the wild, Moyar Valley Ranch was born; for with herculean effort and skill, tenacity of purpose and the will to surmount all obstacles, Hughie literally carved his ranch out of the heart of the virgin jungle.

Mighty forest trees had to be cut down and cleared. Hughie exploited this circumstance by converting them into charcoal, which he then sold by lorry-loads to the far distant towns. Bricks, cut-stones, cement, mortar, and all the other items used in building construction had to be brought from the same places. Carpenters were also imported, who, under Hughie's able directions, soon utilised the better forest-woods for building purposes. A modern building rose in no time. With a windmill battery-charger, the house had electric lighting, a refrigerator and many up-to-date conveniences. In addition, farm machinery was imported, so that in almost the twinkling of an eye Moyar Valley Ranch became a flourishing farmstead.

Hughie has many business interests and frequently travels abroad. Sometimes he returns in a few weeks, but at others he is absent for months, and the following story concerns one of his long absences. He had very kindly offered me the privilege of visiting his farm at any time, and has especially asked me to keep a watchful eye on his livestock. So one day, when we received a letter from Hugh's caretaker, a man named Varghese, that the big panther had killed Hugh's finest Alsatian, something had to be done.

At that time I was immersed in some heavy and urgent work and it was impossible to get away for the next fortnight. Varghese's letter, having travelled by village post, had already taken six days to reach us. But my son Donald volunteered to deal with the panther, and I gladly delegated this job to him. The Studebaker had broken an axle a month earlier and I was still awaiting a replacement from Bombay, so Donald rushed off to his friend's house to borrow a car.

From this point I feel I had better let Donald relate the rest of the story himself, as I took no further part in the affair, beyond giving him a piece of my mind when he returned from the expedition.

'When Dad told me to go to Mudiyanoor, the first problem was to find a car to travel by, as his Studebaker was laid up. So I thought of a friend who had been with me at school, named Rustam Dudhwala. Rustam is a nice fellow and owns three or four cars. So with a bit of sales talk I had no difficulty in getting him interested. It took me just four hours to get together the odds and ends necessary for the trip, and to borrow Dad's lucky tiger-charm, which was given to him years ago by a jungle man named Budhia. I know Dad does not talk about this charm, as he thinks people will make fun of him, but I also know that he appears to have much faith in it. The charm is actually wrapped in a small piece of bamboo, tied with a strand of hair from an elephant's tail. What is inside it I do no know. The whole thing can be worn around the neck, as the bamboo is tied to a piece of string, but Dad generally stuffs it into his pocket.

'Just before leaving I thought of taking another friend along with me, a fellow named Cedric Bone, who is a keen photographer and good sport, and can rough it out splendidly. Cedric was ready to come, and soon the three of us were on our way to Mudiyanoor. I carried my .423 Mauser, which is a far superior weapon to Dad's old-fashioned .405 Winchester. He knows this himself, but like all old-fashioned people prefers to stick to something that is out of date. I also brought my .3006 Springfield as a reserve rifle for shooting deer for the pot. My old man lectures me against killing deer and I pretend to listen to him. When he is around, of course, such killing is taboo; but when he is not there it is quite a different matter.

'The last seventeen miles of the track to Mudiyanoor is really bad, and it took us almost eight hours to get there. Varghese greeted me with a broad smile, although I felt he was a little disappointed because Dad had not come along. That is the trouble nowadays. Young people like me are often not appreciated and the older men seem to regard us as being somewhat irresponsible. They forget that they too were young once.

'Anyhow, Varghese told us that, apart from village cattle, the big panther had also killed a cow belonging to Mr. Hailstone three days ago. The immediate problem was therefore to buy some live bait in the form of half-grown bulls, and for this purpose Rustam came in very handy.

'Let me tell you something about this Rustam. He is twenty-two years old and a Parsee, which community are the descendants of early Persian settlers in India. He comes of a very rich family, who owns lakhs of rupees worth of property in Bombay, bringing in enough

income in a single day to buy me several times over. Apart from this, Rustam's Dad is a shrewd businessman, who earns an income even larger than what comes in each month from the property. He is a very sporting chap and very fond of his son, but sometimes he gets unreasonably strict about letting Rustam go shooting. When that happens, Rustam and I generally contrive to invite my father to visit Mr. Dudhwala, for when these old men meet and talk things over for an hour or two, our hunting trip is assured.

'Well, to return to what I was telling you. Rustam bought four young bulls, which we tied out in different places near where the big panther had recently killed. The first of these we tied near the forest boundary line which runs beside Mr. Hailstone's estate. The second we tied about a quarter of a mile away, near a small lake surrounded by heavy bamboo jungle. The third we tied on the outskirts of Mudiyanoor village proper, and the last on the cart track itself, coming into Mudiyanoor. Dad always makes a practice of setting up his *machan* along with the baits; but as Varghese had offered the use of Mr. Hailstone's portable *machan,* I decided to set mine up only after a kill had occurred.

'We took care to secure our baits by tying the hind legs to stout stakes driven into the ground, for it is a mistake to pass a rope around the neck of a live bait. Sometimes panthers, and tigers especially, are reluctant to attack an animal with a rope around its neck. They kill by grabbing the neck, and they feel suspicious of a rope, which would get in their way.

'At the last moment Varghese informed us that a tiger had been calling in the vicinity of the bungalow for the past two days. So as an afterthought, instead of a rope I used Mr. Hailstone's chain for securing the bait tied on the forest line near his bungalow. This was because I felt that if the tiger killed this bull he might break the rope and carry it away. As there were no other chains, the other three baits had to remain roped.

'Rustam wanted to go shooting wild pig that night in the fields around Mudiyanoor village, but I stopped him, as a shot might disturb the panther. Next morning, all four of our baits were alive and we were disappointed. But shooting is a game of patience, as Dad has taught me, so I told Rustam to be quiet and not expect developments for another day or two. On the third night the big leopard killed the bull tied on the forest line near the bungalow. It so happened that the tiger also killed the second bait tied among the bamboos near the forest pool the same night.

'Now I was faced with a problem. "Damn the panther," I said to myself "I will get the tiger." But there were other circumstances to be considered: Rustam reminded me that my purpose there was to shoot

the panther which had killed Mr. Hailstone's livestock. It was my business, therefore, to sit up for the panther. I knew that he was right and that Dad would say the same. Still, it seemed a bit thick to lose the opportunity of sitting up for the tiger, and I tried hard to persuade Rustam to take on the panther. But he has some of his father's business instincts, and clung to his previous arguments. So, realising I was cornered, I had to give in.

'Cedric elected to come and sit up with me, as he felt that there were more chances of seeing the big panther by being with me, than of seeing the tiger by going with Rustam. He thought Rustam would make too much noise and would drive away the tiger before it ever appeared at the kill.

'So I got to work and had Mr. Hailstone's portable *machan* hung in the tree that grew about thirty yards from the dead bull. Rustam, for his part, got the villagers to erect a *machan* in a tree that grew close to where the other bull had been killed by the tiger. I forgot to mention that, in tying all these four baits, I had taken the precaution of tying them close to trees, so that there would be no trouble later in erecting *machans.*

'Both parties left the bungalow at about 4 p.m. Rustam had a longer distance to cover, so he and Varghese, complete with sandwiches, water bottle, torches, warm mufflers, blankets and what not, started off at a brisk pace. Cedric and I strolled along to the forest line with our packet of food and a single water bottle. We felt blankets were unnecessary as the weather appeared to be warm.

'Sitting in any *machan* is a tiresome business, and I always find it difficult to remain still. My old man has told me many a time that sitting like a graven image is absolutely essential, but how he does it I don't know. I have sat with him often and his style is to fold his legs beneath him, settle himself very comfortably, smoke his pipe, drink a little tea from a flask, and then become a graven image for the rest of the night. But all sorts of things happen to me. I get pins and needles in my feet, my back feels stiff and begins to ache, and the mosquitoes worry me considerably: not only do they bite me, but they find their way into my ears and nose and the only method of getting rid of one is to wait till it settles down to feed, and then give it a smart slap. Dad tells me that this is not the thing to do when on a *machan;* but perhaps he forgets that my blood, being young, is probably more attractive to the mosquitoes than his. You will understand, I am sure, that old men take quite a delight in telling younger people what not to do.

'Anyhow, by the time it grew dark at seven o'clock, these mosquitoes were already very busy on both Cedric and myself. I had already told Cedric to abstain from slapping mosquitoes, which was probably why he nudged me, once or twice, when I did so myself.

Time passed, and then, at about a quarter to eight, we saw a longish object, that looked grey in the darkness, appear as if from nowhere. I must explain that, although there was no moon, there was a diffused glow all around from the stars that always seem to twinkle much brighter in a forest. There was enough light, at least, to show up the bigger trees and this grey object, but not the dead bull, which happened to be black. Well, the grey apparition moved towards where the bull lay, and shortly after we heard the rattle of the chain, followed by the sound of eating, and the crunching of bones. Slowly, I raised my rifle to my shoulder, but as luck would have it, my torch, which was fixed to the rifle barrel, struck against the tree and made the slightest of noises. There was a loud growl from the direction of the kill and the same grey object began walking across the forest line towards my left. Soon it disappeared, and then, after about ten minutes, reappeared to my right, but almost beneath us. I heard the sound of licking, and it seemed that the panther was seated there on its haunches. This time I got the rifle levelled properly and pressed the switch of my torch. The bright beam lit the panther, sitting on the ground in a dog-like attitude, hardly twenty yards away, It looked up at me, and taking a quick sight, I pressed the trigger. My best friend, the .432, roared, and the panther fell over sideways. I thought it was done for, but then it suddenly picked itself up again and sprang into the forest below the tree where we were sitting.

'Cedric had been very excited while all this was happening, for no sooner did the panther disappear than he prepared to climb down. I restrained him, and he said, "Come, let's go after it". But I told him not to be a fool and that we had better wait till morning.

'We sat there for nearly another hour. The mosquitoes became so unbearable that we decided to get down and return to the bungalow. I descended first, and Cedric handed me the rifle. Then he followed with the water bottle. The last six feet he took at a jump, and as he hit the ground with a thud there was an awful roar from very near. I swung around, pointing my rifle, with the torch burning, in the direction of the sound, but we could see nothing. After waiting for some minutes, we went forward a few paces, but the lantana undergrowth was very dense here and it seemed unsafe to follow up in the darkness. We then went to the spot where the panther had been seated when I fired, and began to look around for blood.

'There were no traces to be seen by the light of the torch and the alarming idea occurred to me that perhaps I had made a complete miss. I discussed the matter in undertones with Cedric, but he was certain that my bullet had struck the panther. Still, I was doubtful and we eventually decided to go back to the *machan,* on the very slim chance that I might have missed and the panther might later return to

its kill.

'The rest of the night was extremely uncomfortable, what with the mosquitoes and the intense cold that began to set in with the early hours of the morning. We stuck it out, however, and dawn found us a very dejected and disappointed pair. We climbed down from the tree and stretched out in the green grass below it for nearly an hour, in order to give the sun a chance to rise, and to relax our stiffened muscles. Then, shortly after seven, we began to look for blood tracks in earnest. In a little while I was heartened to find a few drops where the panther had entered the lantana, and then quite a considerable amount at a spot about forty yards inside the undergrowth. It was now quite evident that he had been badly hit and had lain down here; also that it was he who had growled so loudly the previous night, when Cedric had jumped down from the tree. In fact one realised that the panther had not driven home a charge at the time and caught us napping.

'Cedric photographed the spot. He is one of those camera-enthusiasts who take photos of practically anything and everything.

'I found that from this point a blood trail was visible for upwards of another hundred yards. Within this distance he had lain down once more, which confirmed the fact that he had been badly hit. Then the blood trail became less distinct, probaly because fat, or a piece of membrane, had covered the bullet hole and stopped the external bleeding.

'The undergrowth was fairly dense and we searched carefully everywhere, but there was no panther to be found. The forest line continued, and I walked along the edge of it, peering into the lantana in the hope of seeing the beast.

'I had gone perhaps another hundred yards, Cedric following with his camera at about twenty paces, keeping to the open of the forest line, when it suddenly happened. Evidently the panther had been lying concealed beneath a bush on the opposite side of the clearing and had escaped my notice. He waited till I had passed and then, with a characteristic coughing grunt, he charged me. Cedric was almost level with the place where the panther had been hiding, and how it had not seen him and charged him, instead of me, is a mystery and very lucky for Cedric. Probably the panther was too busy watching me and preparing to make his surprise attack. Anyhow, he charged, but hearing that coughing grunt, I sprang around in time to see him coming. Fortunately, my bullet of the night before had smashed his right foreleg, which dragged as he came on.

'Throwing my rifle to my left shoulder—from which I shoot—I pressed the trigger and sent the bullet crashing into his throat. He lurched forward on to his chest, still snarling vigorously, and this gave

me time to put in a second shot.

'Only then did I notice that Cedric was close behind, and was fairly dancing with excitement. He had been in my direct line of fire, and I might have shot him instead of the panther. But this incredible enthusiast had actually taken a photo of the charge. How Cedric had the nerve to take it, when ninety-nine men out of a hundred, completely unarmed as he was, would have turned tail and fled, beats me. It only goes to show that an enthusiasm for photography enabled him to forget everything else. He tells me he just aimed the camera and depressed the shutter mechanically, without thinking what he was doing.

'When we returned to the bungalow to tell the good news, we found that Rustam and Varghese had already come back, having sat up till about 2 a.m. The mosquitoes had by this time got the better of them, and as the tiger had not put in an appearance, Rustam and his companion had decided to call it a day, and get back to the bungalow for a nap.

'We carried the panther in by nine o'clock and had skinned him in about an hour. It proved to be quite a large male, measuring 7'8" from nose to tail.

'After an early lunch, I suggested to Rustam that we should go and see about the bull over which he had sat. I must not forget to tell you that, in the meantime, Varghese had sent out men to see what had happened to the third and fourth animals. These men returned to inform us that both were still alive.

'When we reached Rustam's *machan,* we found that the tiger had returned to its kill, probably in the early hours of the morning after Rustam had got down. Perhaps it had been watching, and had come to know that he was up there. Later when the coast was clear, it had come back for a late meal. About three-quarters of the bull had been devoured.

'Rustam was extremely disappointed, but was determined to sit up again. Then I had an inspiration. Wisely, or unwisely, I sent Varghese with one of the men to fetch our fourth bait, which had been tied on the track approaching Mudiyanoor village. It took about two hours to bring this animal, and we tethered it about thirty paces from the remains of the old kill. My hope in doing this was that the tiger might be induced to attack it, in case he hesitated to return to the old kill, which had been dead for two days and was stinking horribly. Rustam opposed this plan, because he felt that the tiger would be frightened away by finding a live bull where he had left a dead one the day before. But I felt the chance was worth taking.

'At about 5.30 p.m., the three of us, Rustam, Cedric and myself, got into the *machan* , having already arranged fresh green leaves for

concealment, those of the previous night having been withered by the heat. Rustam was to have the first shot, and I would follow up. Cedric had fitted a flash bulb and reflector to his beloved camera, in the hope of securing another exciting photograph.

'With the approach of dusk myriads of insects of all kinds came from the nearby pool to make our existence a torture. But we were young and extremely keen. Rustam had long been waiting for an opportunity to shoot a tiger.

'Eight o'clock came, then nine and ten, but a little later we heard the moaning call of the tiger, as it descended a hillside beyond the pool about a mile way. About forty-five minutes passed, when a kakar gave forth its hoarse call from the denseness of the bamboos to our left. It was clear the tiger was coming, and we were all keyed up with intense excitement.

'We waited. It was much darker here than it had been at my *machan* of the night before, because of the bamboos. I whispered to Rustam to wait till the tiger either attacked the live bull or came back to its old kill, when I would use my torch to help him aim. Fortunately, the live bull was a white one, and we could see it faintly, and hear it snorting and struggling, as it tried to free its leg from the tethering rope. It was clear that the creature must have had some inkling of the approaching danger and its ultimace fate.

'There was a silence for ten minutes. Then there was a deep "Woof" and the tiger sprang on to the live bull. Rustam was trembling like an aspen with suppressed excitement, but I gripped his shoulder firmly to keep him quiet. There followed a hoarse gurgle from the bull, and a sharp snapping sound as the vertebrae of its neck cracked and the carcase thudded to earth.

'I maintained my grip on Rustam's shoulder. Another period of silence followed for almost ten minutes, before the tiger began to bite the rear of the bull in its first operations to tear out and remove the entrails.

'Still we waited, and then we heard the scratching sound made by the tearing of membrane as the tiger started to pull out the bull's intestines. I judged that by now its attention would be fully occupied by its kill; so gently releasing my grip on Rustam's shoulder, I nudged him to prepare for the shot.

'He raised his rifle, as I did mine. After about ten seconds I pressed the button of my torch. As the beam shot forth, the tiger, which had been lying on its kill sideways to us, turned around and looked up. At the same moment Rustam switched on his torch too, and in the two beams the tiger was distinctly visible as he stared back. Seconds passed, and I began to wonder whether Rustam was going to fire. Then, just as I was about to press my trigger, the roar of the

double-barrelled .405/400 rent the night.

'Rustam had fired both barrels simultaneously, and the kick from the heavy weapon must have been considerable; I felt him lurch violently backwards. Nevertheless, both bullets had sped true to their mark, smashing into the tiger's neck just above the shoulder. The animal shook violently and then sank forward, just as if it was going to sleep. The tail twitched a few times and then was still. Rustam had shot his first tiger.

'We waited for another half-hour, but there was no movement from the animal; so we got down from the *machan,* still keeping the torch focused on the tiger. But it never stirred. It was evident that the tiger was dead. Upon examination, Rustam was jubilant at finding he had killed a fine male, which measured 9'4" from nose to tail-tip.

'And so we returned to Bangalore, an extremely happy party. Rustam had got his tiger, and I had succeeded in killing the panther that had been harassing Mr. Hailstone's animals. But of the three of us I think Cedric Bone was the happiest at having taken a marvellously lucky photograph and a marvellously lucky escape from what would have been a severe mauling, if not a painful death, had the panther attacked him instead of me.

'I told Dad the story, and he congratulated both of us. But he never at that time realised the narrowness of Cedric's escape from the panther, as well as from my rifle bullet.

'Next day, when he saw the photograph, he started to say a lot of uncomplimentary things. At the time I felt he was rather harsh and quite unreasonable; but, as I think of it now, the old man was right.

'I had made two major mistakes. Firstly, I had not looked carefully enough in the undergrowth, and had passed the panther without seeing it. Secondly in my excitement I had fired with a human being directly in my line of fire, and about twenty paces away. They say fortune favours the beginner, and it certainly was so in this case.'

Eight

The Mauler of Rajnagara

At the moment of telling this story (november 1995), the 'mauler' is still alive, having defeated every effort I made to 'bag' him. And not only my own efforts, but those of several other hunters over a period of rather more than two years.

The mauler is altogether an unusual tiger, in that his habits are very un-tigerish and his haunts are in areas where no tiger has been heard of for many years. His habits are untigerish in that the earlier records of his activities were entirely confined to mauling men by scratching them with his forefeet. There were thirty-three instances of such attacks by this tiger, his victims being mainly herdsmen. In not a single case did he either bite or kill his victim. In every case he severely scratched the man from the crown of his head, down his face and neck, and across his chest and back.

This conduct at first led me to think that the so-called tiger was really a 'panther' after all. But when at a later stage I questioned several of his victims, every one of them affirmed that it was a tiger and not a panther that had attacked him.

I was also led to think that the animal had been wounded or otherwise injured in some part of its jaw, mouth, or face, so that he could not drive home his attack by biting his victim. This theory was entirely refuted by the herdsmen, who stated that during two years, the same tiger had killed and eaten over two hundred of their cattle. They had examined many of these kills after the event, and in no case was any evidence found that the tiger had been unable to use his teeth properly. He had not only killed his prey in regular tiger fashion by breaking its neck, but had eaten each animal in a very normal and thorough manner.

The next strange thing about this animal was that he had begun his depredations in a most un-tigerish stretch of the forest, consisting of low scrub and thorn: very rocky, undulating hillocks with occasional steep boulder-strewn rivulets between them, flanked by long grass and occasional clumps of bamboo. It was known that panthers frequently roamed this area, and had even been seen on the main road that ran through it; but a tiger was unknown to the existing generation.

This stretch of forest lies immediately to the south of the Dimbum escarpment in the district of North Coimbatore. A sharp drop of over 2,500 feet from Dimbum brings you to this region of arid

scrub land, dotted with frequent palm trees, and consisting mostly of thorny bushes and lantana shrub. Other game is also scarce, being confined to a few peafowl and an occasional jungle sheep. The area is comparatively small, being about five miles from north to south, and about thirty miles from east to west, where it adjoins the Bhavani river, which eventually flows into the river Cauvery.

We are told that this tiger had originally come from the Nilgiri jungles, had wandered down to the Moyar river and then taken its abode in this region. Its fondness for this locality can otherwise be well understood, for it is an area scattered with small *cattle-patties,* and entirely devoted to grazing hundreds of cattle. Hence, what it lacks in natural wild game is more than balanced by the large number of domestic animals, which are much easier prey to any tiger.

The story goes that at the earlier stages the tiger killed normally, ate his kills normally, and decamped normally, when he was 'shooed' off his kills by enraged herdsmen. But, as the old proverb says, 'too much of anything is good for nothing'! Or, at least, this tiger seemed to think so. The herdsmen evidently made themselves too much of a nuisance to him, when too frequently they drove him off his kills.

The first attack, as is usually the case, was made on a herdsboy who had had the temerity to throw a stone at him, just as he was in the act of dragging away a fine fat cow he had killed. The stone is reported to have struck the tiger's flank; the tiger is reported to have dropped the cow and charged the boy, whom he severely scratched about the face and chest. Then he went back and carried off the cow, which he thereafter ate in peace.

On several later occasions herdsmen and boys tried to drive him off the beasts he had killed, or was in the act of carrying off, or was actually eating. In each case the tiger attacked and scratched the intruder.

Naturally, as such attacks multiplied, he was left more and more alone. He was evidently a very wise tiger and had arrived at the sensible conclusion that it paid him high dividends to scratch but not to kill the intruders; for they thereafter left him more and more to devour his kill untroubled.

And so time dragged on. Nearly two years had passed and the victims of his scratching rose to thirty-three. Of these eleven died of subsequent blood poisoning, arising from the putrid matter in the tiger's claws. But these deaths, of course, may not be regarded as intentionally caused by the tiger himself. They were only an indirect consequence of the attack.

And then, in July 1955, the first human being failed to return. It was known that he had been attacked by the tiger, for his screams for help had conveyed this information to another herdsman, who had

been standing near. This individual, very naturally, had run away. In the earlier instances, the victims had generally managed to stagger back to the main road or to the cattle village, whichever happened to be nearer. But this victim did not return. Some two hours later a search party set out to look for him. They came to the spot where the attack had been made. This time they found the dead cow, but they did not find the herdsman. The party lacked the courage to follow up any further, and the herdsman was never seen again.

A half-dozen more attacks were made, in three of which the victims turned up as usual, badly scratched. But the remaining three did not. Nor were they ever seen again. So the official score, at the time my story really starts, amounted to four killings and thirty-six maulings; the mauling, in every case, only by scratching. Whether the tiger actually ate these four men it had presumably killed, or only dragged them off to some remote part of the jungle, where they had been later devoured by jackals, hyaenas and vultures, there was no means of knowing.

I had read, now and then in the papers, of this animal's doings but had no details until an official report reached me from the forest authorities. Also at about this time I had a few days' leave to my credit and thought it would be best spent in seeing if I could catch up with this tiger.

The forest map I possessed, together with the information received, indicated that the best place at which to make my headquarters would be the small village of Rajnagara, where there was a little forest 'choultry' that would give me and my belongings shelter. This place, via Dimbum, is exactly 147 miles from Bangalore, and the road being quite good, I reached it in my Studebaker in just over four hours time, at about four in the evening.

I had no idea that an exciting time was ahead of me, for I was only two miles from Rajnagara itself, and was driving along the road through the arid scrub area, when I saw three men in front of me, one of them being supported by the other two. As I drew abreast of them, I saw that the man in the middle was covered with blood. Stopping to enquire the reason, I was told that only a few minutes earlier he had been attacked and severely scratched by this strange tiger. Closer questioning elicited the fact that the tiger had attacked him after creeping up on him by stealth. The victim told me that, before he knew he was in any danger, he had heard a low growl; then the tiger appeared beside him, reared up on its hind feet and scratched him severely about his face and chest. He had fallen down with the tiger on top of him, and had shouted for help. The tiger then left him and charged the cattle, which were milling around. As he lay bleeding on the ground, he had seen the tiger kill a half-grown brown bullock,

which it had then dragged away. As nobody had come to his assistance, he had struggled to his feet and stumbled towards the road, still shouting for help. His two companions had joined him a little later.

I regarded the opportunity as godsend, to be followed up at once, and asked him to tell his companions the exact locality where the attack had taken place. He did so, and I then asked for one of the men to accompany me to the spot, while the other went on to Rajnagara with the victim.

A heated altercation now took place between them, both pleading urgent business at the village. It was clearly apparent that neither wanted to expose himself to the risk of meeting the tiger. For this I could hardly blame them, as the animal had already established his ferocity, while I was a complete stranger to them. They had absolutely no guarantee that I would not run away when the tiger showed up, and leave my companion in its clutches.

By much pleading, coercion and even threats, I eventually induced one of the men, very reluctantly, to agree to come with me, while the other continued with the wounded man.

My companion and myself then left the road and walked into the jungle. All along the path we came on splashes of blood from the recently wounded man. In crossing a bare stretch of rock these were plentiful, causing me to realise that he had been more severely hurt than I had actually noticed during my hurried conversation. I began to think that I should have taken him in my car to Satyamangalam, where there was a hospital, rather than leave the poor fellow to get there as best he could. Against this admitted negligence on my part, however, was the fact that I had a unique opportunity to meet this tiger face to face and settle the score once and for all.

A little later we came to the spot where the tiger had attacked the man. The sand on the trail clearly told its own story. We began to look around for the place where the tiger had killed the brown bullock, and soon found it some thirty yards away. My companion now refused to go any further, nor did I want him to, as he was understandably in a state of abject fear and would be much more a liability than an asset. So I left him standing nervously and began to follow the dragmark clearly made by the tiger as he had hauled the brown bull downhill towards the ravine that lay between the hillock down which I was creeping, and another and much higher hillock a quarter of a mile away.

Unfortunately, I had not anticipated such early action, and was wearing ordinary leather shoes instead of the rubber-soled boots I favoured for stalking. Try as I would, these shoes made some noise on the hard ground and the rocky boulders that were scattered there.

Nevertheless I proceeded as silently as I could, till I had almost reached the *nullah.* Then I stopped and gazed about me. The scrub just here was very thick, and grew thicker where the rivulet was actually winding. My eyes roved over the slopes of the opposite hillock, which were fairly open. No signs of the tiger or the bullock were visible, and it was obvious that he must have hidden it somewhere in the *nullah,* and most probably would be eating it at that very moment. Even if he was not actually eating it, he would certainly be lying somewhere in the vicinity.

My shoes put me at a distinct disadvantage, and would betray my further progress towards that *nullah.* If I removed them and attempted to advance in my stockinged feet, I was almost certain to step on a thorn, not to speak of the sharp stones that lay everywhere. At the same time, I realised the opportunity was too good to be lost, and should be pressed home somehow. It was a chance in a thousand, which I might never get again. The time was just 5 p.m., and there was an hour and a half before sunset.

While I stood debating the odds, the tiger made the first move. He had quite obviously heard me; probably he had seen me too. Anyhow he had, after the manner of a great general, decided to make a flank attack. Quite unsuspected by me, he had already crept up the very slope down which I was moving, but at a slightly different angle, which brought him above and behind the spot where I stood thinking. Then he had evidently crept on his belly towards me, and was hiding behind a large bush, scarcely ten feet away, all unknown to me. In this particular case, my sixth sense of impending peril quite failed to register. I had just decided to advance towards the *nullah,* when there was a shattering roar behind me, and the tiger sprang out; I spun around and fired at point-blank range, missing him completely.

Probably the noise of the explosion, perhaps the strangeness of meeting someone who was obviously not a herdsman, or maybe rather the loud scarlet-and-blue check bush-coat I happened to be wearing, scared him off. For with a series of loud *"Woofs'* he bounded into the thicket and towards the *nullah.* I followed as fast as I could, reaching the bed of the *nullah,* where I almost fell over the brown bull. Examination showed that the tiger had already begun his meal before he had heard or sensed my approach, and had come forward on his own to the attack.

There were no trees in the vicinity, so I sat under the thick bush till it began to grow dark, hoping against hope that the tiger might put in a second appearance. But this he did not do, and at 6.15 I cautiously retraced my steps the way I had come. Reaching the place where I left the herdsman who had accompanied me, I found him missing and concluded he had gone home. So I went on to the road

where my Studebaker stood, and shortly after reached Rajnagara.

Here a considerable crowd had gathered, and from a forest guard who was among them I found that the wounded herdsman had already proceeded to Satyamangalam hospital, together with his wife and brother. The herdsman who had accompanied me, whom I had left standing at the spot where the tiger had made his attack, while I had followed up the drag-mark alone, had failed to return.

I knew that he had not been at the place where I had left him, also that the tiger had run away after I had missed it. Where had the herdsman gone? We all realised that he would not remain in the jungle, or on the road, in a vicinity haunted by this tiger. What had become of him? I pondered this question, while his wife and family, who were also among the crowd and had overheard my enquiries, began to weep and wail.

It was now quite dark, and to search for the missing man would be impossible, as no traces would be visible had the tiger taken him away. Nevertheless, calling the forest guard to accompany me, I drove back to the spot where I had earlier left the car. Here we halted for a while, and I instructed the guard to call the man by name. This produced no results. We drove a further mile along the road and then returned to the village. By now it was evident to me that my companion of the evening before had been taken by the tiger. Evidently, while I had spent an hour sitting in the *nullah,* watching for the tiger to return to the carcase of the brown bull, the tiger had done some hunting on his own, and had carried off the unfortunate herdsman.

We did not get much sleep that night, having to listen to the weeping and wailing of the man's family, who squatted at the door of the forest choultry and amidst tears, reminded me that I was responsible for his death. This though impinged itself on my conscience very forcibly, for had I not almost forced the poor man to accompany me he would have been alive at that moment.

Early dawn found me retracing my steps to the spot where I had left him. Reaching it, I began looking around for any signs of struggle or other marks of the tiger's attack. Absolutely nothing was visible on the hard ground.

In the course of my search I walked around in ever widening circles, but still could find nothing. What had become of him was a mystery. I knew he had not followed me while I had pursued the tiger the previous evening. It was more likely that, being afraid of standing alone, he had begun to walk back towards the road. Working on this theory, I now turned back and slowly retraced my steps, looking around for possible traces.

About three hundred yards from where I had left him I found the

first evidence in the form of an odd leather sandal, and not far away its fellow. At this spot short dry grass covered the ground and so no footprints were visible. But the position of the sandals made it clear to me that he had kicked them off, obviously in order to run faster. Searching around as I walked, I then saw something white flapping in the breeze under a bush to my left. It was the man's *loincloth* in India known as a *'dhoti'.* On the grass, and sprinkled on the bushes, were tiny splashes of blood, while closer inspection showed where the tiger had dashed through the undergrowth and caught up with its victim. From here the tiger had dragged the man in a course almost parallel with the road, towards the same *nullah* in which I had been sitting all the while the evening before, but considerably further down from where he had hidden the brown bull.

I must have walked a quarter of a mile before eventually stepping on to the rocky bed of this rivulet. Nothing was to be seen and here was complete silence. I knew the tiger must have hidden the remains somewhere in the vicinity.

While watching quietly, a couple of magpies attracted my attention from a spot about one hundred yards downstream. They were perched on the top of a thorny *babul* tree, where they were jabbering excitedly, frequently looking downward. The signs of the jungle are very clear to those who can read them. The magpies had either found the body, or were looking at the tiger, who in turn was probably looking at me.

Keeping to the centre of the *nullah,* I began to tiptoe forward, the rubber boots I was wearing this time making no noise against the rocks. Halfway to the *babul* tree, the magpies saw me, ceased their jabbering and flew off.

I had marked the spot where they had been perched, and approached cautiously. Immediately below the *babul* tree, a small elongated black rock jutted from the bank on to the bed of the stream, and lying behind this rock were the half-eaten remains of poor Muniappa, the missing man. Soft sand at the spot also revealed the tiger's pug-marks, and a cursory examination of them showed that the animal was a male tiger of no great size or build.

Once again, there was no tree in the vicinity on which I could sit, except the aforementioned *babul,* which was unusable because of its thorny nature. Nor, as it happened, were there any large bushes or bamboo clumps under which I could shelter. In every way the spot was about the most unfavourable, if not impossible, one for 'sitting up' that I had ever encountered. Still, I would have to do something about it for by this time there was absolutely no doubt in my mind that I was, at least indirectly, possibly directly, the cause of poor Muniappa's death.

I knew the tiger was not likely to return to his meal until the afternoon at the earliest. If I left the body as it was, the vultures would see it within a couple of hours and pick it clean. So I removed the khaki coat I was wearing and spread it over the corpse, weighing it down here and there with small boulders that lay at hand. Then I went back to the car and returned to Rajnagara.

Here I was forced to give the bad news, which not only led to renewed wailing, but a demand from the bereaved wife that the body of her husband be brought back at once for cremation. It took us a full hour to persuade her to give me a chance, that evening, for a shot at the tiger by sitting over the body, a chance which would be entirely lost if she had her way. Eventually, she very grudgingly assented.

After breakfast, I called a 'Council of War', which consisted of the village *Patel,* the forest guard and myself. Explaining to them the position in which I had left the body, I told them that I would return to it at noon and sit beside the body to wait the tiger's return. They thought this was a foolish idea, and I heartily concurred. But as nobody could suggest a better one, there was no alternative but to carry it out, other than to bring the remains back to the village and thereby lose a possible shot at the tiger.

Shortly after midday found me seated a few yards from the cadaver, from which a distinctly unpleasant odour was now rising. In fact, millions of bluebottles had already settled on my coat, and as soon as I removed it they swarmed over the remains.

I was prepared for the unpleasant situation, having plugged small wads of cotton wool into my nostrils; but despite these measures that awful stench penetrated my defences, and in time I began to feel sick. The heat was terrible. The silence was absolute, except for the chirruping of the cicadas from the branches of the surrounding bushes.

Three o'clock passed, then four and then five. At five-thirty a peacock flapped down to the streambed. As I sat motionless he had not even noticed me, which goes to confirm how invaluable absolute stillness is when out in a forest. He walked up the bed and only when ten feet away did he become aware of the two strange objects before him. He rose into the air, hurriedly and heavily, with a tremendous beating of his wings to gain momentum before he was able to fly away.

As may be imagined, I was by this time in a state of great excitement, and even greater fear, and I was, besides, on the verge of retching from the awful stench that rose from the half-eaten man.

Then followed complete silence for fifteen minutes: a silence that was all-pervading, that envelops one, that is everywhere, even in the very air. There was not even the creak of the wood-cricket, nor the

twitter of the tiniest bird, nor even the faintest rustle of a dry leaf falling to the ground. Only a total and absolute stillness. That is what silence feels like, when one sits waiting for a man-eater to appear.

Although I was sitting perfectly motionless, my eyes minutely searched the scrub before me and on either side. All my senses were fully and painfully alert. But no sight nor sound registered on them.

The cheery evening crow of a junglecock, a little further up the *nullah,* relieved the tension. Six o'clock came, and then six-fifteen. An early nightjar began his peculiar clucking call. I knew that the time had come for me to leave. In a short while it would be completely dark, and then to sit for the man-eater in the open would be suicide indeed.

Getting stiffly to my feet, I walked back to the car, where I had previously arranged for a party of men to meet me and bring back the remains of the unfortunate Muniappa. It was quite dark by the time I collected them. But I knew my torchlight and their numbers would render us immune from any attack by the tiger. We returned to the ravine, where we gathered up all that remained of the unlucky herdsman in an old blanket which the men had brought with them for the purpose. Then, while the little procession wended its way towards Rajnagara, I motored back along the road.

Early next day found me again prowling about near the little *nullah.* The tiger had not returned to the spot where the body had been, as I could see by the absence of tracks. I then decided to walk along the bed of this stream towards the place where the brown bull had been left two days previously. I did this very cautiously, as the stream bed narrowed in places to hardly more than six feet and at points was nothing more than a pile of boulders or was entirely overgrown with lantana shrub. The brown bull had been hidden more than half a mile from where the man had been eaten. It had been hidden well beneath an overhanging bush I knew was safe from vultures. But when I reached it, it was only to find that the tiger had returned during the night and demolished it completely. Perhaps he had lost interest in his human kill or may have seen me earlier in the evening, sitting beside it, and become suspicious. Anyhow, the fact was that no kill remained and I would have to try other means of meeting the tiger.

Up till noon that day, and again in the evening I roamed about over hillocks and through valleys, across other streams and along their beds. Many times I came across the tracks of the tiger, but never once did I see him, nor catch any sign of his presence in the vicinity.

I spent three days in this fashion, but with entirely negative results. I had taken only a week's leave and had scarcely four days left in which to shoot the tiger.

Next morning I adopted fresh tactics. Climbing to the top of a large hillock in the centre of the terrain, I called as loudly as possible, in tiger fashion. Every ten minutes or so I repeated the call, hoping to hear an answer. Two hours later I did the same thing on a neighbouring hill. No sound came in reply. In the evening I followed the same plan, and yet the tiger did not respond. It was clear by this time that he was not in the immediate vicinity.

On the fifth day the herdsmen went out again with their cattle. You, who read this, may consider it a very brave thing on their part, and doubtless it was. But you must also realise the cattle were dependent for their food entirely on grazing. No grazing meant no food, for no provision had been made in any of the cattle villages for a reserve of fodder.

That morning, I joined the herdsmen and wandered amongst their animals, doing the same thing in the evening. But night fell without any sign of the tiger. The sixth morning found me very despondent, as I felt the animal I was after had moved away and would not give me a second chance to bag him. But there was nothing more I could do, beyond mixing with the various herds of cattle as they grazed in the area.

I covered a number of miles that morning and was about eight miles from the place where Muniappa had been killed when, at about noon a group of men came running through the shrub to tell me that another herdsman had been attacked three miles away.

I hurried with them to where the man was lying. I saw once more the familiar signs: severe scratches across face, chest and sides, but no bite whatever. This man had lost a good deal of blood and was too weak to walk, so I hurried back to my car, instructing the men to carry him to the road. From there I took him to Satyamangalam, where I left him in the local hospital in pretty bad shape. Then I dashed back to the spot on the road to which he had been carried, left the car and went back into the jungle. There was no difficulty in following the copious blood trail he had left behind him, and this led me to the site of the attack.

In this case I discovered that the tiger had not succeeded in killing any of the cattle, which had escaped by stampeding *en masse* to the road. So searching for the tiger seemed again a hopeless undertaking. I wandered around, and every now and again called in tiger fashion, hoping to attract him. There was no response, and so ended another day.

That night I thought of motoring up and down the road that led through the shrub for about five miles, using my spotlight in the hope of picking up the tiger's eyes, should he be passing anywhere within range. I began to put this plan into practice at about 10 p.m., driving

slowly, allowing for a stop of fifteen minutes at the end of each trip. Six hours of this monotonous procedure found me desperately sleepy and with a very low petrol tank.

Thus dawned the seventh and last day of my leave. After the latest attack, the herdsmen had not turned out with their cattle, so for the last time I wandered alone through the scrub, hoping to meet the elusive tiger. Noon found me about six miles from my car, when I turned and began to retrace steps.

I was walking down hillock and just reached the small depression at the foot of it. Before me another hillock rose. No stream traversed this valley, which was dotted with a few stunted *babul* trees, growing amidst the usual lantana and other shrubs. Hardly fifty yards ahead, the tiger stalked out. We saw each other at the same moment, and then, with a short bound, he disappeared behind a lantana clump.

Raising the rifle to my shoulder I advanced slowly, expecting, and even hoping, for a charge that would bring him to my sights. At the same time I was mortally afraid, and my heart beat a loud tattoo.

The charge never came! A sixth sense appeared to have told him that here was no victim, but one who was deliberately out to destroy him. He must have slipped away before I drew level with the bush behind which he had disappeared, for he most certainly was not there. I walked around it and searched everywhere, but I never saw him again.

Thus ended my seventh and last day. The time had now come for me to return to Bangalore and duty.

Although this is the story of an unsuccessful hunt—indeed, a story of complete failure—I have told it so that the reader may realise that such adventures are not always crowned with success. Failure and disappointment are far more frequent. But the hard work, strenuous effort, the very thrill of the chase, the pitting of human brains against animal instinct— all these factors are there, and to a considerable extent compensate the enthusiast for his failure. For although I was really sorry that I had to leave the herdsmen, at least for some time, to the continued ravages of this animal, I felt satisfied that I had done my best and I looked forward to returning, when I might meet with better luck.

I handed a cheque to Muniappa's widow and started on that five-mile stretch of road on the beginning of my return journey to Bangalore. As the thorn bushes flashed past the car, I bade a temporary farewell to that extremely cunning and quite extraordinary tiger, which had not only succeeded in outwitting me at every encounter, but had also successfully hidden the reason for his peculiar habit of only scratching and not biting his victims—except those he actually killed.

The Call of the Man-Eater

Introduction

In this new book of adventure stories i have striven to do something more than provide an account of the pursuit of some of the larger wild animals of the beautiful land in which I live. I have endeavoured to recapture and portray to the reader's mind not only the events as they happened but also the background in which they took place.

The chapter entitled A Night by the Camp Fire' is a description of what has occurred many times when I have spent such a night in the forest, and I have tried to take the reader with me on such an excursion, and to introduce him to the sights, sounds and incidents that are likely to be experienced. In two later chapters I have let myself go, so to speak, in thinking aloud about the many wonderful days and nights in which strange or amusing incidents, and even some foolish ones too, have taken place. These memories are very precious indeed to me, and I trust I shall never live to outgrow or forget them. If in recording these musings of mine I have been able to bring to the reader even a fraction of the pleasure I have derived from recounting them, I will be more than satisfied.

I have also related some of the habits of a few of the lesser-known creatures of this wonderful land, and of some of the better-known creatures too, in order to bring them to the reader more intimately—my humble friends of the jungle in whose company I am very happy and contented.

A big movement has just started in India, although unfortunately very late, to instil into the public mind a love of the wild creatures around them, priceless living gems in the diadem of India that have all but vanished for ever. Many places that once teemed with game and resounded to their joyful and melodious voices are now realms of silence. Before this unique heritage becomes altogether a thing of the past, it is the duty of the government, and more particularly of every Indian, to put an end to the wanton slaughter that still goes on, night after night and every day of the year. For the sportsman of the future, I would strongly advocate the camera instead of the rifle and gun. It

can give you every bit as much fun—clean fun, unstained by the smell of blood, the sight of death, and the pricking conscience of regret.

So I invite you on a wonderful journey to places that may be new to you and are vastly beautiful to behold—the jungle that throbs with life, although hidden from your view. At night you can feel it around you, just outside the range of your flickering camp fire, where the wall of blackness begins and stretches far into the moonlit forest aisles and glades, or into the deep shadows of the jungle on a moonless night, where, to quote Lawrence Hope:

> There was no sound; he gave no cry,
> The careless stars looked on serene.
> The jungle's sudden tragedy
> Remained unheard, unknown, unseen.

The soughing of the night wind through the boughs of the lofty trees, the quiver of a million leaves that whisper like a distant ocean; the flash and flicker of fireflies that dart among the branches; the blackness all around, and the deeper blackness that moves stealthily within it unseen; and the weird, unearthly cry of the distant jackal pack: 'Ooooo-ooh! Ooh-where? Ooh-where? Where? Where?' And the answer of the leader, punctuated by the chorus of vixens: 'Yes, Here! Hee-re! Hee-ee-yah! Yah! Yah! Yah!' Then at last that awesome but thrilling call that sweeps across the hills and echoes through the mist-laden valleys: 'A-oongh! O-o-n-oon! Augh-ha! Ugh! Ugh! U-u-u-gh!' The call of the man-eater!

So put your man-made cares aside and visit these wondrous regions with me, where the jungle presides and the laws of nature hold sway. In the words of still another poet, let the wild places speak to you in the silence of your heart and mind:

> So ye learn within my arbours
> Where the sleeping wild things lie,
> A reverence for nature
> Which the city's streets deny,
> Ye learn the real value
> Of the man made from the loam;
> And ye kneel and thank your Maker
> As ye wend your footsteps home.

W.J.K.S.

One

The Call of the Man-Eater

It was just after midnight, and the darkness outside was intense. I lay comfortably stretched in the long armchair on the verandah of the forest bungalow at Joldahl, with both feet upon its wooden rests, smoking my pipe and listening to the sound that is music to the ears of every jungle lover in India and a challenge to every *shikari* and hunter.

It moaned across the forest range; and then, as the creature padded its silent way through the jungle, clearly to my ears came the softer sigh of contentment in the knowledge that it was the supreme lord of all it surveyed. 'Ugh! Ugh! Ughaugh!'

In my imagination I could picture the caller. In that intense darkness its tawny coat, with the bold black stripes and the white spots behind the ears and at the base of its throat and belly, would hold no colour to an observer were he able to see them. Indeed, it would be unrecognizable as a tiger at all. The watcher would only see, if he could see at all, a black shadow, blacker if possible than the surrounding jungle.

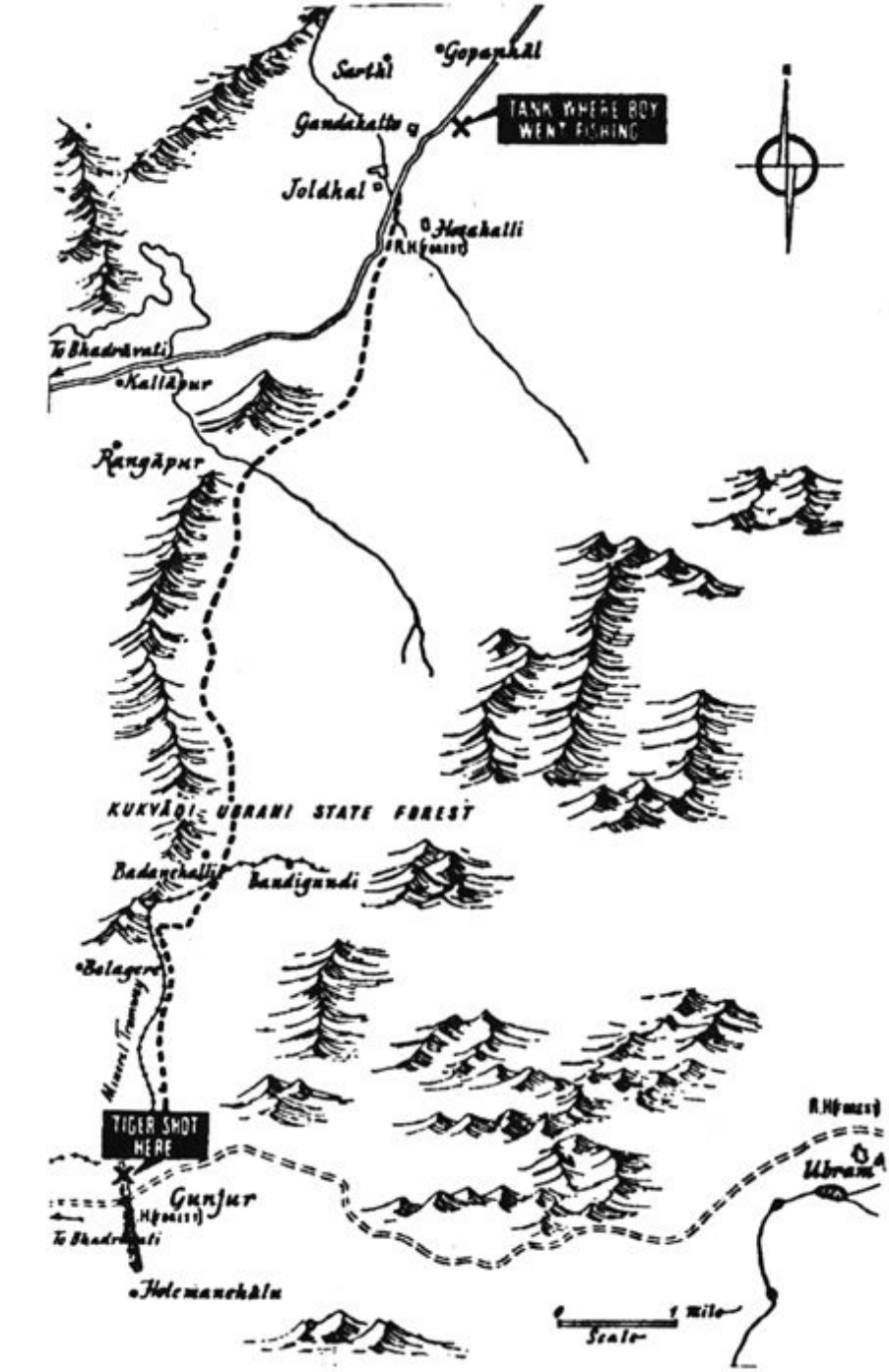
If the watcher happened to be a man, unaided by a torch or moonlight, he would see nothing, for human sight is not made to see more blackness where the blackness is already complete. He would know, however, and unmistakably, that a tiger was near. The roars that seemed to make the very jungle tremble would tell him; and the watcher would tremble himself. If he was a trained and experienced hunter with exceptionally acute hearing, he might catch the faint rustle of grass, or the sound of a leaf brushing against some heavy body as it passed. He would not hear the crackle of a twig, because the tiger would not be so careless as to step on such a thing, for he is himself a hunter, and hunters do not betray their presence nor make mistakes.

Should the observer be seated on a low branch of a tree and the tiger pass directly beneath, and should he have a really keen sense of smell, he might possibly wonder at the sudden, very strong 'greenish' odour that might be carried briefly to his nostrils. Then, if he is a religious man, he might be wise to raise a hurried prayer and hold his breath, and not move a muscle nor flicker an eyelid. For although a tiger has practically no sense of smell, he has abnormally acute hearing and marvellous sight, to catch the minutest of movements in his vicinity. Should he hear or see the watcher at that instant, the

watcher might watch no more.

For the tiger to whose roars I was listening was no ordinary tiger. He was a man-eater!

You may well ask what was the use of all this stealth, this wonderful hearing and sight, this uncanny sixth sense that all tigers possess, when the stupid brute was advertising his presence by moaning and sighing and roaring? Which is a fair question, and one which is difficult for me to answer convincingly, not being a tiger myself. I can only make a suggestion. Most strong people, well developed muscularly, good boxers or wrestlers, cannot remain silent and modest about their prowess. All of us are tempted at times to boast of our accomplishments. Even men who 'have a way with the ladies' talk of their conquests and say they are irresistible. Perhaps the tiger is just such an egoist, announcing far and wide that he is the unvanquished, the fearless, the all-conquering lord of the jungle, and finds joy in hearing his own challenge echoing across the hills and valleys, the glades and thickets of the forest, knowing full well that every living thing that hears him will fear and tremble and hide. Perhaps he is morose and lonely, tired of his own company, just as you and I feel at times, seeking company, especially if that company should be a sleek, graceful, beautiful tigress. May be he has just eaten heartily, and he is merely going for a late after-dinner walk to help his digestion; you and I do that sometimes, too, and while we walk we whistle or sing.



But I have started this tale badly and have been rambling, when I should have begun at the beginning. I certainly cannot tell you why the tiger was there, beyond the fact that tigers do live in jungles. But I

should have explained how I came to be lying in the armchair on the verandah of the Joldahl forest bungalow at dead of night, smoking my pipe and listening to those awe-inspiring but marvellous and melodious sounds.

It all came about in this way. Just over a dozen miles from the town of Shimoga, which is the headquarters of the district of the same name, in the state of Mysore, is the almost equally large town of Bhadravati, which has become an industrial centre of considerable importance, boasting a large iron and steel foundry. The iron ore, mined at a place named Kemangondi, some miles away on the Baba Budan mountain range, is conveyed downhill by a succession of cable-buckets to the works at Bhadravati. Fuel is provided by charcoal from wood constantly felled in the extensive surrounding forests. The glow from the blast furnaces of Bhadravati is visible for many miles reddening the horizon and reflecting against the clouds in the sky.

Joldahl is about fifteen miles from Bhadravati, on a road that leads more or less eastwards to Chitaldroog. It is completely surrounded by dense jungle and boasts a delightful Forest department bungalow. About ten miles southwest of Joldahl, and also in dense forest, is another forest bungalow, slightly less picturesque. This is situated at a place called Gunjur.

I had often camped at Gunjur in the old days. It is a pretty spot. But the only word to describe-the road that leads directly to Gunjur is 'vile'. It branches off to the east from the main road from Bangalore to Tarikere and Bhadravati, about five miles before reaching Bhadravati. From that point it is no longer a road but a cart-track, and a very bad cart-track at that. I have negotiated it in my Model T Ford in early years, and in my Studebaker since then. In all its twenty miles my sympathies and unstinted praise have gone to Henry Ford and the Studebaker brothers. My nerves were at breaking point all the time, yet I never broke a spring or an axle on any of the trips I made there.

At the Gunjur bungalow there lived a very hard-working and obliging caretaker who did all he could on every occasion to make my stay comfortable. This caretaker had a lovely little daughter. She was about twelve years old when I first met her, and she was very interested in watching the cars and in scanning my firearms at a respectful distance. Also, like her father she was very helpful. She would fill her waterpot at a spring nearly a furlong away and carry the load to pour into the old zinc tub in the bathroom of the bungalow, for my use.

This child grew up into a lovely girl of about seventeen years. Her father had, customarily and painstakingly, made all the arrangements for her to marry a respectable villager at Joldahl, and the marriage was soon to take place.

One day she took her waterpot to the spring to fill it for the use of her father and herself. They lived in the humble outhouse (known as a 'godown'), sandwiched between the kitchen and the garage at the rear of the forest bungalow. But she never returned. For, as she stooped to dip the pot in the spring, the man-eater got her.

He carried her away, screaming, into the jungle that grows to the edge of the spring. Her father heard her. He had no gun. Grabbing a woodchopper as his only weapon, he gave chase, running as fast as he could, till he actually overtook the tiger.

He shouted at it in Kanarese—his native tongue: 'Let go my child, you brute. I will slay you for this.'

The tiger heard and turned. He saw the man running behind. The cowardly streak that is latent in the heart of every man-eater filled him with fear. But the feebly struggling victim in his mouth offered too tempting a meal to be so easily relinquished. So the tiger increased his pace and bounded away into the jungle, while the poor girl's cries grew fainter and feebler and soon died away. I was later told by the bereaved man that he never found his daughter's remains.

There is no road connecting Gunjur and Joldahl, only a winding footpath that creeps down densely forested valleys and across hills for about ten miles. Joldahl itself, as I have said, is fifteen miles from Bhadravati, on the road to Chitaldroog, and roughly northeast of Gunjur. That road at least is quite a good one.

I am told that it was about two months later that a little Muslim boy went fishing in the small lake that lies about six furlongs from the cluster of huts that form Joldahl hamlet. He must have had quite a bit of luck, for a dozen fish, including murral, cat-fish and small carp, were found afterwards in the basket he had brought, together with the two rods he was using.

Fishing in India, by the way, is not done with reels, or by using bait such as 'spoons' and 'fly'. The rod is a thin length of bamboo; the reel a length of string; the float a quill, made from the wing-feathers of a peafowl, horned-owl or hawk; and the bait is an earthworm dug up in the ditch by the wayside.

Perhaps the luck he had met with had caused the boy to dally further into the evening than he would have done had he caught fewer fish. He stayed till it was getting dark. But dusk is the time when tigers come out. And the man-eater was no exception.

The boy never returned home. Eight o'clock came and it was time for food. His father and eldest brother, who knew he had gone to the tank to fish, took lanterns and sticks and went to fetch him. Probably they intended to beat him with the sticks. They found the two rods and the basket of fish. But not the little boy. Instead, the light from their flickering lamps revealed the pug-marks of a large tiger in the

ooze. The tiger had come out of the jungle, had slipped in the mud, and had gone back to the jungle. But not alone. The tiger had taken the boy with him.

On the grass was something that looked black and shiny. When they stooped and touched the shiny blackness and looked at their fingers, they found them red. It was blood. Father and son ran back to the village.

Then there was a third killing, but nobody worried about it. A madman had turned up at Joldahl; no one knew who he was or whence he came, and being quite mad he could not tell them. In India, lunatics are treated with a certain toleration. Little boys and girls may sometimes tease them. The elders check the children and give the madman a handful of food. Beyond that they take little notice of him.

So the madman ate such food as was given him in charity and slept by the wayside at night, outside the locked doors of the huts. But one morning he was found to be missing; nobody showed any concern. Two days later, a couple of forest guards patrolling the jungle that surrounds the village, saw vultures circling in the sky and swooping to earth. So they thought at once that some animal had been killed, perhaps a deer, and that there might be some flesh left on the carcase — enough to sell, or anyway to eat. They hurried to the place where the vultures were gathered and found there, not the remains of a deer, but the whitening bones of the madman. Only his head, that lay at a little distance and grinned at them as stupidly in death as in life, provided the clue that identified the bones as those of the missing lunatic. Imprinted in the soft sand around the head were the pug-marks of a tiger, a fairly large one.

I had not even heard of these killings till a friend of a friend of mine, who had been motoring from Chitaldroog to Bhadravati, stopped for a couple of days at the Joldahl bungalow to do a little hunting. There he heard about the tiger and its three victims. The bungalow caretaker at Joldahl, being distantly related to his counterpart at Gunjur, had told him that the first victim had been the promising daughter of the man who looked after the Gunjur bungalow. When he returned to Bangalore, the gentleman told a friend of mine all about it. Knowing I am in the habit of following up such information, Joe Thompson, the friend in question, passed the story on.

The death of the girl whom I remembered so well prompted me to write a letter to the Forest Range Officer at Joldahl, asking for details and particularly whether the rumour I had heard, that the daughter of the caretaker at Gunjur had been the first victim, was really true. His reply, five days later, confirmed the sad tale.

So I went in the Studebaker direct to Joldahl, where I learnt the story I have just related. That had been forty-eight hours earlier. Since then I had walked to Gunjur by the ten-mile footpath and met my old friend, the caretaker, there. He wept bitterly as he recounted his daughter's tragic end. I promised him that I would try to avenge her and asked him to let me know at Joldahl should he hear or see signs of the tiger within the next week.

He had suggested that I should camp at Gunjur, but I said I preferred Joldahl for two reasons. Firstly, there had been two killings there. Secondly, the Studebaker was available for quick transport and the roads were usable. Then I returned by the same path to Joldahl.

I had been sleeping inside the bungalow that night when I awakened shortly after midnight to hear the tiger calling in the jungle, and I had come out to the armchair on the verandah, to smoke and think and listen to that awesome sound. As I heard it I could not refrain from thinking back a few years to the happy face of the pert little girl who had been so interested in my cars and my guns each time I visited Gunjur; who had fetched water for me of her own accord; who had grown into a handsome lass on the eve of marriage; who had now fallen prey to the magnificent but cruel beast to whose call I was at that very moment listening.

It came again! A-oongh! Aungh-ha! O-o-o-n-o-on!'

Involuntarily, I shuddered. The sound faded into the distance, and as far as I could judge the tiger was going towards Gunjur, probably walking along the very footpath that led there. I determined to check this first thing in the morning and fell asleep as I thought about it.

The mosquitoes were active until dawn and prevented my sleep from being particularly sound. But I was up before daylight, and after swallowing some coffee and *chappatties,* waited for the sun to rise a little before setting out to try to pick up the trail of the animal that had been calling the night before. It would not have been safe to have set out earlier with the possibility of the tiger lurking anywhere in the bushes beside the path. The half-light of early dawn can be as deceptive as the evening twilight, whereas I knew that with the rising of the sun the man-eater, in all probability, would retire till evening to some sheltered and remote spot to avoid the heat of the day.

I found what I was seeking a little over a mile from the bungalow. The tiger had walked along a narrow ravine, then leapt on to its bank and had started to follow the very path I was traversing, which led to Gunjur. His fresh saucer-like pug-marks, that had been made a little after midnight, were clearly imprinted in the powdery earth as he walked along the centre of the track. He had been disdainful of any interference, for he had been calling as he had

walked, knowing well enough that every living creature would keep out of his way.

There was no conclusive evidence that this tiger was the man-eater; but something about his haughty manner told me that it was so, and I was reasonably certain that I was correct. I decided to follow the pug-marks to discover whether the tiger had indeed gone all the way to Gunjur or had turned back after covering part of the distance.

I found that for two miles or more the beast, whose pug-marks showed that he was a large male, had walked along the centre of the footpath. Then the tracks dipped to the dry bed of a stream, which the tiger then began to follow. As far as I could judge by the position of the sun, which was climbing higher and growing hotter every moment, the stream led roughly southeastwards, so that tiger track were now moving away from both Gunjur and Joldahl. But this was not for long. After about half a mile he had climbed the right-hand bank of the stream and had entered the forest, where I soon lost sight of his tracks on the hard, dry gound.

It occurred to me that he might have doubled back on his trail and had returned through the jungle to rejoin the footpath to Gunjur which he had been following before he had met the stream. With this idea, rather than flounder about in the undergrowth, I retraced my footsteps till I met once again the pathway leading to Gunjur. I began to follow it and was delighted, after I had walked nearly a mile from the stream, to find the tiger's pug-marks again in the sand before me. I had guessed correctly. He had taken a short cut through the forest to resume his former course towards Gunjur.

This action clearly revealed that he had made up his mind to go there, and I knew from my experience that he would not change it unless something extraordinary occurred to make him do so. My surmise proved to be right for, excepting a deviation here and there, the tiger had followed the footpath all the way to Gunjur. Keeping sight of his tracks had prevented me from walking as fast as I might have done, so that it took me four hours to cover those ten miles, and I presented myself to the caretaker of the bungalow just after eleven o'clock.

This man's name, I must tell you, was Ananthaswamy, and I told him how I had heard the tiger calling at Joldahl shortly after midnight and had followed the pug-marks that morning direct to Gunjur. Ananthaswamy told me he had been awake since four in the morning but had heard no sound from the tiger. However, two or three sambar had belled shortly after 4.30 a.m., while the spotted deer had been restless at dawn, sounding their calls of alarm from the base of a small hill to the south of the bungalow. We agreed that the tiger's silence, together with the alarm cries of the two species of deer, showed that

he had come to Gunjur on serious business.

Now it is a mistake to think that every man-eating tiger or panther subsists on human flesh alone. Both species, particularly the former, are voracious eaters, and if they should decide to live on human flesh only, two things would happen. In the earlier stages the number of people who would die would be enormous, as on an average a tiger makes a kill at least twice a week. After that, when people had become so cautious as not to afford the tiger the opportunity of killing them, he would eventually starve to death. What really happens is that the man-eater takes a liking to the flavour of human flesh, encouraged all the more by the fact that he soon finds human prey much easier to catch and kill than wild animals. So a stage is reached when he will prefer killing and devouring a man, woman or child to killing domestic cattle or wild animals like deer and wild pig. But when he cannot easily find a human being he has no hesitation in reverting to his natural diet till the next opportunity offers. Added to this is the strange fact that, no matter how many people he may kill and eat, a man-eating tiger and panther remain basically afraid of the human race. This has been proved over and over again when a man—or sometimes a woman—has resisted or attempted to resist and even retaliate. Often enough the fiercest of man-eaters has turned tail and fled. But never at any time does a tiger fear domestic cattle or the wild beasts he preys upon, with the exception of the adult bull bison and the elephant.

So, not having had the luck to catch another human being at Joldahl, the tiger had evidently decided to come to Gunjur, where the low hills and wide grassy valleys are heavily stocked with deer. The chances were that he would stay there for some days, slay and eat a few sambar and spotted deer, and when well-filled would start thinking once more of indulging his newly-acquired taste for human flesh.

Except for the caretaker, who was now living alone, there were no other people at Gunjur, for there was no village. So after the few days were over, the tiger would probably go back to Joldahl, or try his luck around one of the other small villages bordering the main Bhadravati-Chitaldroog road. There was thus every hope that the man-eater would remain in the vicinity of Gunjur for the next two or three days at least. This hope would be strengthened if he succeeded in killing a deer and satisfying his immediate hunger, when he would lie up and feed on the remains during the following forty-eight hours. And there was no reason why he should not succeed, for Gunjur, as I have already said, abounds in deer: sambar, spotted deer, jungle sheep and four-horned antelope.

It is also a favourable place in which to bait for tiger, because the

clearing in which the forest bungalow stands, and also the spring not far away, are encircled by small hillocks, which would afford the tiger a grand-stand view of any bait that might be placed conspicuously in the open valley below.

Unfortunately, apart from my rifle, I had brought no kit with me. My torch, my warm dark clothes for sitting up at night, my primus stove and stock of provisions were all at Joldahl bungalow. But that was ten miles away and I had just covered the distance. To go back for these things and then return again with them meant a thirty-mile trip altogether. The prospect was not enticing. Besides, I could not complete the trip before nightfall.

Ananthaswamy offered to lend me his torch, although it was only a two-cell affair. He also offered free board and lodging if I was prepared to share the only food he had— *ragi* balls. *Ragi* balls are prepared from ground *ragi* grain made into a dry porridge and then pressed together with both hands into a ball about the size of a cannon ball. It is very wholesome and sustaining, but quite tasteless.

Having accepted his invitation, there was another and greater snag to be overcome. Ananthaswamy had no animal of any sort to tie up as bait. He did have a dog—a rank, mangy cur. But a dog is useless as bait for tiger. Besides, as a dog lover myself, I refuse to use one as bait under any circumstances.

There was one more question. Was I not being rather over-optimistic? How did I know for certain that the tiger I had followed was the man-eater? He might be just a normal, extremely well-behaved and inoffensive game-killing and cattle-lifting beast. I talked the whole thing over with Ananthaswamy. His dark eyes glistened with pleasure when I accepted his hospitality and said I would stay with him for a couple of days. He said he was sure the quarry was the man-eater because there were no other tigers in the vicinity at that time. As for bait, he said that could easily be solved. He would himself sit or stand in the open as bait while I hid under cover or on a tree - *machan* to shoot the tiger—if possible before it leapt upon him. And in the same breath he said: 'Don't think, *dorai* , that I am doing this for your sake. Don't think I am doing it because I am brave and have no fear—for I am terribly afraid too. But I am doing it—and doing it cheerfully— in an attempt to avenge my little daughter. She was everything to me—all I had in the world after her mother died at childbirth and her elder brother, just a little later, of smallpox. I will gladly sacrifice my life to bring about the death of her cruel slayer.'

His simple and magnificent courage was touching and affected me deeply. But this was no time to indulge in sentiment; nor did I want a brave man's blood on my hands. Remember: the nights were dark and I would be using his two-cell torch. Nor had I brought the

clamps with which to fix the torch to the rifle. I would have to hold it in my left hand and try to shine it along the barrel of the rifle while shooting. That would entail delay—at least a couple of seconds in which to get the beam correct. And even one second would be long enough for the tiger to pounce on Ananthaswamy and kill him.

Very emphatically, I answered: 'No.' Then, in order not to hurt his feelings while concealing my real reason, I added: 'I shall need you beside me to shine the torch on the tiger when he comes, while I fire at him.'

Ananthaswamy appeared dissatisfied with the explanation I had given him. He said: *'Dorai* can hold the torch in his own left hand up against the rifle, and still shoot.'

Sensing the beginning of an argument I replied: 'No, absolutely and finally, no!'

After that we sat in silence for some time. We were each thinking deeply. Then an idea occurred to me. The man-eater had carried off this man's daughter at the spring where she had gone for water. Perhaps the tiger would remember the kill he had succeeded in making there. Also he had probably seen the girl, and even Ananthaswamy for that matter, go to the spring for water on several occasions. At least he would associate that spring with the occasional visit of a human being. The spring was just a furlong from the bungalow and in a slight depression clearly visible from the surroundings hills. Yes, indeed; the spring would be the best place at which to prepare the bait. As the nights were dark and I had no torch-clamp, that bait could not be either Ananthaswamy or myself. So the only alternative would be to make a dummy to resemble a man in the act of drawing water from the spring, while I would hide myself as near as possible. Near enough for the dim light from the two-cell torch to be effective.

I detailed my thoughts to Ananthaswamy, who was elated. He said: 'Come, *dorai;* we will go at once to the spring and you can select the place where you will hide and shoot the tiger when he attacks the dummy this very night.'

I looked at him squarely, and he returned my look equally squarely. There was frankness and eagerness in his eyes and not a trace of fear, and I knew that this man would not again take 'no' for an answer.

We rose and walked to the spring. The water trickled out from a crack in a flattish rock that lay on the ground. It flowed down a slight slope to a small pool almost three feet deep and about ten feet across. It was from this pool that both father and daughter had been drawing their water throughout the years during which he had been caretaker of the Gunjur bungalow. The overflow of water spread into the jungle

where, being insufficient to form a stream, it was absorbed by the earth. The continuous dampness had caused a growth of lush green grass for about twenty-five yards. Then the jungle began again. Ananthaswamy told me that when he first came to Gunjur the undergrowth grew right up to the pool and had enveloped it. With his daughter's help he had cut this away for about twenty-five yards, so that now only the grass grew there.

The problem that presented itself was: where were we going to hide? The nearest tree in which a *machan* could be built was well over 100 yards away. That distance was much too great to cover with the beam of a torch that held only two cells that were far from fresh. It appeared that the whole plan we had hatched of sitting over the dummy was about to fizzle out, for there just did not seem any place in which we could hide.

I asked the caretaker if he had any ideas. He replied very ruefully that he had not. One fact emerged as quite unavoidable. We would have to sit on the ground somewhere and conceal ourselves as best we could. Or we would have to abandon the whole scheme. The nearest sizeable tree was too far from the pool and the feeble light of Ananthaswamy's torch could not possibly cover that distance. I had tested it in the caretaker's godown and could see that its cells were already half-exhausted.

By common consent, we walked across the twenty-five yards or so of grassy ground to where the undergrowth began. Neither of us had spoken a word, but it was as if we both accepted the inevitable. Here was where we would have to sit—if at all—to await the tiger.

The undergrowth was of the usual sort; wait-a-bit thorn bushes, lantana and other jungly shrubs, all matted together in close and dense profusion. The wait-a-bit thorn is unpopular with everyone, both human beings as well as animals, as it offers an impossible barrier when it grows really thickly; while even a solitary tendril, should it come in contact with your clothing will hold you up for quite a while. If it comes in contact with your flesh, you must be prepared to leave some of your skin behind, impaled on the numerous needle-sharp, hook-like thorns.

At one spot, just where the undergrowth commenced, there was just a wait-a-bit thorn bush; quite a large one, in fact. No man without a knife could possibly pass through it. No animal could do so either, for that matter, except an elephant. So at that moment I looked upon the bush with great favour. It seemed to have saved the situation.

Ananthaswamy,' I asked, 'are the two iron spring-cots still in the bungalow?'

'Yes, *dorai* ,' he replied. Then, as the strangeness of the sudden question registered itself in his mind, he added: 'If the master is tired,

I will open the door of the bungalow and he can lie down and sleep undisturbed.'

Apparently quite irrelevantly, I continued: 'Is there a third such cot on the premises?'

I could see his eyes widen with surprise, and I almost laughed aloud. His thoughts at that moment were written large upon his frank countenance. What on earth can this man want a third cot for? There are two as it) is, and being alone he can only sleep on one of them. He did not answer my question.

I repeated it: 'Is there a third such cot available. Ananthaswamy?'

His eyes opened still wider; but he held himself in check admirably, 'No,' he answered. 'Just the two that have always been here.'

'Come, Ananthaswamy,' I said, turning towards the bungalow. 'Open the door. I want to go inside and look over the furniture.'

Sunstroke, undoubtedly; or some other form of madness. The poor *dorai!* How unfortunate that this should happen at such a critical moment! The caretaker could not disguise his thoughts. This time I did laugh openly.

'Don't be alarmed, Ananthaswamy,' I explained as we retraced our steps to the little lodge. 'I am not going mad. It is in my mind to form a sort of cage for you and me to sit in, right where that wait-a-bit thorn-bush now grows. The two cots turned up on their sides—the longer sides by the way—will form a sort of barrier for us. In between the springs we will weave the wait-a-bit thorn branches and tendrils that you will have to cut. The front will be open, for in that direction we will face the dummy.

'But there is one snag, Ananthaswamy. A mighty big one. We will have to find something, some third article of furniture, to form the third barrier on the third side. For we can only watch in one direction, and not in two, my friend. Don't forget the nights at this time are dark; very, very dark. And your torch is in poor shape.'

It took quite a time for the plan I had outlined to sink into his mind. We were walking while we talked, and when finally he did catch on, he reacted rather unexpectedly. Coming to an abrupt halt, the caretaker bent double, slapped his thighs with the palms of his hands, and laughed and laughed and laughed.

'By Krishna!' he chortled, 'I never heard of such a plan before. We are to make a cage of the two beds and some other furniture and sit inside it to wait for the tiger? And the beds will be covered with the wait-a-bit thorn? *Dorai,* I will tell this plan to my children, and my children's children, after them. I swear it.'

Poor Ananthaswamy. He quite forgot he had no children. The tiger had devoured his only remaining one. Besides, there was little

prospect of being able to make good his intentions. For he did not even have a wife!

He opened the door of the bungalow and we went inside. The two iron spring cots were there, one in each of the bedrooms. The other furniture consisted of a large dining table, two smaller tables, two dressing tables (one with a cracked mirror and the other with no mirror at all), one fairly large almirah, the usual armchair common to all bungalows, and about half-a-dozen old, wooden-bottomed chairs. In the bathroom was an ancient zinc tub, a brass wash-basin on an iron stand, and a towel-rack. There were no commodes; for purposes of that sort one had to go outside to a mud-walled latrine, where there was a hole in the ground topped by two flag-stones.

I looked at this array of furniture with sinking feelings. For one thing, the almirah was too massive and the two of us could not carry it for a furlong to the spring. The small tables were too small. So we had to choose between the dining table and the armchair for our third barrier. The dining table was certainly the safer and more sturdy alternative. But the trouble lay in the fact that its flat top, when laid sideways, could not easily be hidden by the thorns or even with leaves. It would prove a very conspicuous object that would not only arouse the suspicions of the tiger, but might frighten if off altogether. But at least the shape of the armchair lent itself to a little disguising.

'We will take the armchair,' I decided, explaining my reason to the caretaker.

I looked at my wristwatch. The time was 12.25. 'If your *ragi* balls are ready, Ananthaswamy, we will eat them. Then we must set to work. We have a terrible lot to do.'

I ate half a *ragi* ball. It was as much as I could manage. Swallowing the tasteless stuff was aided by frequent gulps of water. But Ananthaswamy ate two. Then he put water in a *degchie* and left it over the remains of his fire. This was to make tea when we returned. We would need it then; we certainly would be tired.

Ananthaswamy brought his hatchet and handed me a spare chopper of sorts, rather a blunt one. We traced our steps to the spring and set to work in earnest. First we cut down the wait-a-bit thorn bush, a task that left us bleeding from many scratches and perspiring from our exertions. Then we went about 200 yards away and cut undergrowth of the same nature as that which was growing at the place where we intended to sit up. This consisted of lantana and other bushes, but certainly no more wait-a-bit thorn. We carried—but not dragged—this stuff to where we had cut down the thorn bush. Dragging would leave a trail that might make the tiger suspicious. It was two o'clock by the time we had assembled all the necessary camouflage.

Next we returned to the bungalow, from which we carried the beds one at a time, one of us at either end, to our selected spot. The rear would naturally be the weakest link in our defence. There we laid one of the cots on its longer side, legs facing outwards. The second cot we placed on its side at right-angles to the first, its legs also facing outwards. Then we returned to the bungalow for the armchair, which we took back and laid on its side, again with legs facing outwards, on the third side of our rough cage—the side facing the bungalow. This we did because we knew it was the flimsiest of our three flimsy barricades, while it was least likely that the tiger would approach from the direction of the bungalow itself. The fourth side of our 'square' was of course open. It faced the grassy patch before the pool where we were going to place our dummy.

Now began the painful task of threading the branches and tendrils of the wait-a-bit thorns into the springs of the two cots, and between the legs and through the canework bottom of the armchair. To conceal the outside of the three articles of furniture completely, we added the undergrowth we had cut and brought from two hundred yards away.

It soon became evident that we did not have nearly enough camouflage to do this task effectively. We had to make another half-dozen trips for more, and even then we had barely enough. Anyway, the task was finished by 4 p.m. Looked at from a distance and from various angles, our *zareba* appeared to be more or less the same wait-a-bit thorn bush that had been growing there a few hours ago. But I was not happy about it. It seemed too much like wishful thinking to accept to deceive such a cautious animal as a tiger with such poor and very obvious camouflage.

Our only hope lay in making the dummy so realistic as to attract the tiger's attention and keep him from looking too keenly in our direction. Success I knew would also, to a large extent, depend on the angle from which he approached. If this was from either flank, there might be a chance that he would not notice our place of concealment. If he came directly from the opposite direction, our hide would be plainly in view and the chances would be ninety per cent against us. But if he came from behind and discovered us, what then? Well, we would not be long in doubt, anyway. Either he would become afraid and just slink away, or he would attack. The chances were about fifty-fifty.

We had to hurry and make the dummy. It was very late already. Getting back to Ananthaswamy's little room, we ransacked his boxes, his bedding, and everything he had. There was no time, and sufficient material, to make anything like a realistic dummy. His filthy old pillow, black with oil from his hair, formed the torso of the dummy. I

punctured this at either side, greatly to his consternation, and stuck a bamboo through the holes; protruding at both sides this bamboo would form the two arms. Another short one at the end of the pillow, into which the rim of a small earthenware cooking-pot was inserted, would be the head. There were no bamboos for the legs, so the dummy would have to appear to be squatting beside the pool; a natural enough position, anyway, for a man to be in when drawing water.

On to the pillow went one of the caretaker's old torn shirts, the bamboo arms protruding through its sleeves. Over that a white coat, to make it conspicuous. Around the earthenware pot, a turban of sorts. That was easy enough, anyhow.

But how on earth were we to keep the dummy sitting up? I looked around desperately. Then an idea struck me and I dived into the bathroom coming back with the wooden cross-member from the towel-rack. A final hole at the bottom of the pillow, which was almost ruined anyway, and the cross-member from the towel-rack was forced through the cotton, past the bamboo that formed the arms, and through the opening at the base of the earthenware head, to reinforce the bamboo that was already there. That made quite a good neck. At least it was strong.

It only remained to plant the other end of the cross-member firmly in the ground. But it was five o'clock already. There was no time for food. Who wanted another dose of *ragi* ball, anyhow? And no time for tea. That was tragedy. In our hurry we forgot about the tea and the water became cold again.

'Bring the hatchet and the other chopper, Ananthaswamy. Put on a warm coat, too. Don't forget the torch. And bring two water-pots to make it appear the dummy is drawing water. Hurry, man, hurry!'

We hastened back to the pool, at the edge of which the caretaker scooped a hole in the ground with the chopper. I stuck the 'backbone' of the dummy into this hole and pressed the earth back firmly once more. We placed the two water-pots on the ground, one on each side. *Mafiz feluce;* lo and behold! The dummy sat beside the pool. Very sincerely we hoped that to the eyes of a hungry man-eater it might appear like a human being squatting there and drawing water. To my eyes it looked only a ludicrous mess. One more look around, to see that everything was in order, then from in front we carefully stepped into our 'stronghold'.

We sat down, the caretaker to my right, while I was next to the armchair. I needed him to my right, as he was to shine the torch when the tiger came. For purposes of aligning the sights of the rifle, the light would be too far away if he had sat on my left, for I fire from the right shoulder.

It was just three minutes short of 5.30 p.m. and I knew we should have been in position at least an hour earlier. We were facing east and the sun had already dipped below the rim of hills behind us. In a few hurried and whispered sentences I gave Ananthaswamy his final instructions.

'On no account should you move your head, arms or legs. If the mosquitoes bite, blow them off. Don't slap at them. If you hear or see anything, nudge me gently with your left knee. On no account should you even whisper. If the tiger comes. I will tell you by prodding you twice. That will be the signal. It will probably growl when it leaps upon the dummy and finds no flesh and blood beneath its talons. Then shine the torch and keep it on the animal, whatever happens thereafter. Remember, you should not waver or let the torch go out. If you do that, we are dead men; because I cannot see in the dark and the tiger can.'

His reply was reassuring, 'Do not fear, *dorai.* I shall not let you down. Certainly not, for Rajamma's sake.'

Rajamma had been his daughter's name. After that we did not speak again.

'Tok-tok-tok-tok.' A green and red woodpecker tapped away with his powerful beak at the bole of a tree in the forest behind us. Then the belligerent little spurfowl began to quarrel in the bushes around. 'Kaaw-wick-a-wack,' said the challenging cockbird, and his challenge was taken up in all directions. 'Kukurruka-wack! Kukurruka-wack!' The quarrelsome little cocks were just spoiling for a fight. Far away a koel, a member of the cuckoo family, issued his plaintive cry, calling for rain, as the jungle-folk say. 'Koel! Koel! Ko-yel! Ko-yel!', he screeched in rising crescendo. His cousin, the brain-fever bird, also of the cuckoo family, decided that the call of the koel was nothing to the crescendo he could raise, if he really tried. And he did, 'Brain-fever! Brain-fever; Brain-fever!' The crescendo was almost hysterical, nerve-wracking, far eclipsing the effort the koel had made. There was silence for a while, and before the brain-fever bird could start again came a fresh and pleasant sound; the clarion call of the silver-hackled junglecock. 'Whee-e-e-ew! Kuck-kaya-kya-kuck'm,' he crowed lustily. That silenced the spurfowl for a second or two. Then they began their wrangling again, while other junglecocks crowed their farewell to the dying day.

Dusk fell rapidly, as it always does in the jungle. At one moment it was daylight. Then the forest before me assumed a hazy, smoky-purplish hue. A few moments later it was growing dark and it was becoming difficult to see.

The final call from the birds of the day came from a peacock roosting on some high tree far away. Mia-a-oo! Mia-a-oo! Aaow!

Aaow!' he cried, and his cry was hauntingly sad. As if to assert that the time for the peacock to be active was now over, a bird of the night gave answer while it flitted like a bunch of brown soft feathers into the long grass before me. 'Chuck. Chuck. Chuck. Chuck-o-o-o-o.' My little friends, the nightsjars, were active and on the wing once more. A moment later it was night.

I have often noticed that the final calls of day-birds are answered by the early cries of the birds of the night. Then for a while comes total silence. The day-birds have gone to sleep, while those of the night are undoubtedly too busy feeding, except for the small insect-eating bats that flit swiftly overhead as they utter their sharp squeaks. 'Chee-e-ck. Chee-e-ck.' I was grateful to the little wood-cricket that started chirping almost at my feet: 'Sizz.Sizz. Sizz-z-z!.Sizz-z-z!'

The stars shone brightly now, the evening star being prominent among them. The sky was cloudless and of a gun-metal hue, a perfect setting for the myriad twinkling gems that shone so serenely, the incomparable lamps of heaven. There were other scintillating gems too, that moved and flitted in the jungle about us; now here, now there; now gone, but only to reappear. They were the fireflies that hung momentarily in the heavy all-pervading blackness of night, only to be gone the next instant. Then they would momentarily reappear to synchronize their flashes into one sudden, fleeting, instantaneous glare, bright enough to outline the trees far away. Once again they were gone; leaving the darkness behind.

We sat motionless. By and by the mosquitoes came, huming and buzzing around us till the air seemed filled with clouds of them. I could feel the faint but sharp pain as one after the other stung me—my face, my neck, my hands; in fact, wherever they could reach my skin. I blew gently against my own face and tried hard not to move my head or arms. Fortunately my pants, socks and shoes protected my feet. I could hear my companion blowing also, just as I had instructed him.

It was very uncomfortable and trying, to say the least of it. But it was not dangerous. For these were not malaria-carrying mosquitoes. When such an insect stings you, it almost stands on its head with its tail in the air, and you do not feel the pain of the sting. By that very same token, how was I to know how many malarial mosquitoes had already stung me that evening, and how many more would sting me before the night was over?

I glanced at my watch. It was nearly 8.30 p.m. There were many hours yet ahead of us. Ten o'clock came very, disconcertingly quiet—almost peaceful. It was as if there were no other living creatures out there in the darkness. But still we knew that the most dangerous of them all lurked in the darkness, a man-eating tiger which had already

accounted for several people. But did the silence mean that he had wandered away elsewhere? Was that the reason why we had heard no alarm calls from the frightened deer? It was a cheerless and depressing thought.

As if to dispel such ideas I heard a queer cry. Rather, I should say, a distinctive call, of a kind that I had not heard for quite a while now, and is not always heard in the jungle: 'Ba-oooh-ah! Ba-oooh-ah!'

Unmistakably, it was the cry of the 'lone jackal', the mysterious and unexplainable jackal which the jungle tribes say has entered into partnership with a tiger or panther, guiding the carnivore unerringly to a victim. The jackal's share of the partnership is permission, unmolested and freely, to pick the bones of the kill after the senior partner has eaten his fill.

The jackal was drawing closer with each minute, and rapidly too, for his cry every time was louder and more distinct! 'Ba-ooh-ah! Ba-ooh-ah!'

I thought of the rest of the strange rumour: that no victim could ever escape this terrible and diabolical alliance, once the lone jackal had located him or her and the hunt had begun. I shivered involuntarily, and at that instant felt Ananthaswamy's left knee pressing hard against my right thigh. The knee was trembling very violently.

I stared out into the pitch-darkness, attuning my ears to catch the slightest sound. But I could see or hear nothing beyond that ghastly cry that came nearer and louder with repetition: 'Ba-ooh-ah!'

Had my companion seen or heard something? Or was he trying to tell me about the lone jackal? Undoubtedly, he knew the strange tale himself. Perhaps he was not aware that I also knew it. Maybe he was trying to keep me alert, as I had cautioned him not to speak or even whisper at any cost. I forced my mind to put aside all thought of the rumour—true or false, mere superstition or not. To me, now, just one hard fact remained. A jackal was calling strangely, not at all in his usual manner. It was coming closer each second and would be near us very soon. It was up to me to try to find out if it was alone or was accompanied by another animal — perhaps only a pack of jackals like itself.

Once again, and extremely close this time, came that weird cry: 'Ba-oooh-ah! Ba-oooh-ah!'

Did I imagine a note of malevolent gloating in it? Almost a chuckle of derision? A laugh of triumph? Angrily I checked these absurd thoughts and forced myself to be more alert than ever. After that the weird cry was repeated no more. There was just silence, One could almost feel it. Heavy, oppressive silence, very heavy and very real.

Ananthaswamy was trembling violently. His knee beat a tattoo against my thigh. His whole body, which he had pressed against my right arm and side, shook as if with ague. I could hear him breathing hard; in short, sobbing gasps. I slipped my left arm across my lap, closed my hand over his kneecap softly and firmly, and then patted it reassuringly. I did not want a repitition of my experience many years before at a place called Closepet, just thirty miles from Bangalore. That episode had been rather funny, with little danger attached to it. An experience of the same kind now, but under the present circumstances, would certainly not be funny. On the other hand, it might well be the last experience of this or of any other kind that either the caretaker or myself would ever have.

A certain friend, who incidentally was a lady of some repute, had come to me wanting to shoot a panther. We had motored to Closepet, where we had arranged to tie up a couple of donkeys as bait. Two days later, information was brought that one of them had been killed. We drove to the spot to find the donkey had not been tethered properly, with the result that after killing it the panther had succeeded in dragging the donkey away from the foot of the tree where we had tied it to a place where there were only bushes and no trees. So we were faced with the alternatives of sitting on the ground to await his return or going back to Bangalore without further ado. My acquaintance enthusiastically agreed to sit anywhere I decided.

It was a certificate of high merit that the *Shikari* Thangavelu and his brother, whom we had brought with us, earned that day. For they built such a beautiful hide that the panther, when he turned up, never dreamed we were inside. Nor did we ever dream he was outside—or at least not for quite a while.

That night, too, had been dark and moonless. We could not see each other in that dense but marvellously efficient hide-out. After some time I began to hear a faint sound that came from the other side of the bush and to the left of my friend, who was sitting to the left of me.

Rub-rub-rasp-rasp. Something rather rough gliding over something rather soft. What could it be? A snake? Bush-mice? No; the first would rustle for a prolonged time; the second would cause intermittent, jerky noises as they scampered in the lantana. Could it be termites, eating the fallen leaves and dried wood? No; for they would make a sound like rain-drops pattering against the leaves of trees, diminished a hundred times in volume. Could it be caterpillars or night-beetles feeding? No; for caterpillars, when they eat, make no sound. At least, no sound capable of registering itself on the human ear. Some beetles make a very faint sound, like the clicking of fairy castnets: the mandibles of the beetles clicking together as they sever a

leaf, and cause a sharp and brittle sound.

But this was something different. Rasp-rasp. Pause. Rub-rub. Pause again. Silence for some seconds. Then once more. Rasp-rasp-rasp. What the devil could it be?

Suddenly enlightenment came. It was the panther, licking himself with his rough tongue. And he was seated just outside the hide. What was more, he had no idea we were within less than two feet of him.

I remember that I nudged my friend, squeezed her arm, brought my forefinger close to her eyes and pointed towards the apparent source of the noise. Of course, she did not catch on.

Then I had another idea. I dared not whisper, for the panther would have heard me. So, with my left hand I seized one of hers. I unclenched the fingers and turned the palm upwards. All by the sense of feel. I have often wondered what she must have thought had gone wrong with me, what she must have wondered was coming next.

But I did not leave her long in doubt. With my right index finger I started tracing capital letters of the alphabet on the palm of her hand. I traced a P. Then A. Then N, and then T and H.

Then she caught on. And in real earnest. I have never seen a human being spring quite so fast to a standing position from a sitting one. Literally like lightning, she threw herself into the air, tripped over me, and fell head over heels into the bushes at my back, giving me a nasty kick in my face with her boot.

But that was not all that happened. Not by a long chalk. For the panther emulated her feat—and very creditably. Hearing what could only have been Satan himself, or whatever name Satan bears in the language of panthers, spring from the earth beside him, the panther did likewise in sheer alarm. He jumped into the air, somersaulted, and fell on top of the left side of 'wall' of our hide, next to which my companion had been seated a split second before. Realizing he was terrified and might strike out blindly with his claws or even bite, I then gave the grand finale to the entertainment by springing into the air and toppling backwards myself.

Well, it had all ended very happily and safely. We sorted ourselves out without getting too close to each other, at least, so far as the panther was concerned, and he was good enough to reciprocate. He simply vanished.

We had a great laugh over it. My friend avowed she would not have missed the incident for anything—not even for a thousand rupees. But—and here was a real question—would it have ended thus if we had been dealing with a man-eating tiger instead of an inoffensive panther?

Coming back to realities and the present, I feared the caretaker's nerves might suddenly snap. He might do anything: jump up, cry out,

or even scream. And then it might not be so good—remembering we had the 'unholy partners' to deal with, and not just a very ordinary panther. I knew that Ananthaswamy was a brave man and was certainly not afraid of the tiger. But it was the supernatural part of what was happening that was unnerving him—rather, I should say, what he thought to be supernatural: the diabolical partnership, the inhuman, or rather superhuman intelligence of that uncanny 'lone jackal' in leading the man-eater directly to us. I squeezed his knee harder than ever, then tapped it gently, over and over again, to reassure him, to try to calm him.

After that things began to happen fast. I heard the pitter-patter of quick footfalls on the dried leaves of the undergrowth to my left; that was the least fortified side of our absurd little fort, the armchair side, facing towards the bungalow, from which direction we had not anticipated that anything would approach us.

They were coming towards us, and in the undergrowth; for it was the dried leaves that were making the sound. Had it come from in front or even half-left, we would not have heard it, for there the grass was thick and soft and green, and the earth was damp from the proximity of the pool.

The pattering hesitated, came forward again, and then hesitated; forward it came two or three steps, and then it ceased altogether.

The only animal that could have made the pitter-pattering sound was the jackal—that lone jackal. And he had now halted. Why? Was it because he had become suspicious? Had he located us? Or had he stopped for quite another reason? Was his role of 'guide' and junior member now over? Was it the turn of the senior partner to take over?

We had not heard a sound from the tiger. But I was certain—as certain as I was of my own name—that the tiger was there too. Every instinct in me, every fibre of my being, furiously and insistently telegraphed the message. Beware! Danger! The man-eater is close.

Another and still more disconcerting thought flashed to my brain. Perhaps the junior partner, the cunning one, the lone jackal, had deliberately walked through the leaves to make a noise and distract our attention. Perhaps at that very moment the senior partner, the executioner, who meant business, was creeping soundlessly across the damp earth and the green grass in front, to get near enough for the last fatal charge. Worse still, he was perhaps creeping up behind.

I removed my hand from the caretaker' knee, because my hand was trembling almost as much. I stared out into the darkness before me, eyes burning, ears alert. I could see nothing, hear nothing. The seconds ticked away, perhaps the last seconds I would spend on this earth. Sweat ran down my face, trickled from my cheek on to the stock of the .405 which nestled against my shoulder, its muzzle

pointing vainly outwards into the black darkness, seeing nothing. My hands, holding the rifle, were clammy with sweat.

How he got behind us we never knew, but suddenly from that direction burst, with startling suddenness, the weird, diabolical challenge: 'Ba-oooh-ah! Ba-oooh-ah!'

And for the first time that evening, the unholy partner answered. We heard the tiger roar as he sprang upon the dummy. In our excitement we had quite forgotten it. We had overlooked the possibility that the jackal—if indeed he had led the tiger to his 'prey'—had led him to the dummy, and not to us. Our ruse had actually worked.

But Ananthaswamy was so frightened that he did not, or perhaps just could not, shine the torch. He appeared to be paralysed as we sat in inky darkness and heard the tiger worrying his 'victim'.

And at that critical moment we heard another sound— but a comforting, reassuring, homely sound, this time. The caretaker's mongrel dog began to bark vigorously. He must have come in search of his master. He had heard the noise made by the jackal, followed by the tiger roaring and tearing at the dummy. But instead of running away as he should have done, he had started barking for all he was worth.

I prodded Ananthaswamy's thigh vigorously with my clenched fist and whispered very faintly: 'Battery *Podu* (shine the torch).'

He shone it, poor fellow. But not at the tiger. He shone it directly in my face. Blinded, I grabbed the torch from him with my left hand and turned it into the darkness before us, where the dummy had been sitting. It reflected the eyes of the tiger and outlined his form very faintly behind. Raising the torch up with my left hand, I tried to hold it against the barrel of my rifle to outline the foresight while still lighting the tiger and his glaring eyes.

But luck was dead against us that night. Once again the tiger showed the man-eater's inherent fear of the man who pursues him. A loud 'Wr-r-oof!' rent the air, and the next second the tiger had gone.

I shone the torch in all directions, hoping to be able to pick up his eyes at some other spot. But he had disappeared. I shone the torch behind us, hoping to locate that accursed jackal, which most certainly I would have shot had I but seen it. But like his partner he had vanished. Then something small and brown and white ran whimpering towards us. Could it be the lone jackal? At last at our mercy? But it whimpered and barked as it came. It was only Ananthaswamy's little dog.

Fifteen minutes later the three of us got up and started walking back to the bungalow. It was obviously useless to stay any longer. The trick of the dummy had been exposed. Both tiger and jackal now knew

that men were there—not unwary men—who would slay them first. So they had decided to decamp.

As we walked back to the bungalow I reversed the conclusion I had made only a few minutes earlier. I had thought that this had been my unlucky night. Now I was sure that it had, indeed, been a very lucky one. For one thing, the so-called cunning partner, the jackal, had not proved so very cunning after all. He had warned us of the tiger's coming. Secondly, when I shone the torch, but was not ready to take the shot, the tiger had accommodatingly decided to run away. Supposing he had attacked us instead? Thirdly, perhaps by his sharp bark the little dog had helped to unnerve the tiger and had made him decide to bolt when he could have sprung upon us very easily.

Yes indeed, it had been a lucky, rather than an unlucky, night! We had both been scared stiff. We had both bungled and therefore lost the tiger. But recriminations are useless anyway. So we went to sleep.

The sun, shining brightly and warmly next morning, helped us to forget our disappointment of the night before. Ananthaswamy was thoroughly ashamed of himself. He assured me, repeatedly, that it was not the man-eater he had been terrified of, but the uncanny evil spirit, the lone jackal, the inexorable brain behind the diabolical partnership. I assured him, in turn, that I had been equally afraid, but of the tiger and not of the evil spirit or lone jackal with the calculating brain. Thus, with the air cleared between us by a mutual confession of cowardice, we started planning afresh.

It was very doubtful if the trick with the dummy could be tried again with any chance of success. The tiger, having discovered that, instead of leaping upon a living man, he had attacked a bundle of old clothes and a water-pot, would not be so foolish as to be taken in a second time within twenty-four hours. So we would have to think—and think really hard—of some fresh line of action.

I studied the pug-marks of the tiger, or such of them as we could find near the edge of the pool. He had leapt upon the dummy and then slipped in the mud as it had crumbled beneath his weight, so that there were just two fairly clear impressions of his forefeet—probably at the spot where he had stood still for a second while I had tried to align the small torch with my left hand along the barrel of my rifle. They appeared to be of the same size as the tracks left by the animal I had followed the previous day along the footpath to Gunjur. On the green grass he left no trail, while the jungle behind was dry and stony, showing no marks at all.

One fact was evident. With or without the aid of the jackal, the tiger had been pretty hungry. He had attacked the dummy straight away, and that had left him more hungry than ever. He would have to eat, and soon. Therefore, either he must have killed some animal

during the later hours of the night, or he would do so in the early hours of the night to come. As a rule tigers do not hunt wild game during daylight, and there were no domestic cattle at Gunjur. Alternatively he had already left, or would leave the locality at sunset, because of his fright, and take himself elsewhere.

Together we walked back along the footpath to Joldahl for about a mile. But the tiger had not returned that way. We went back to Gunjur and climbed up a knoll half a mile from the bungalow. From this elevation we carefully scanned the sky and it would betray the presence of a kill, if there had been one. But no vultures were to be seen in any direction.

Midday found us much more disconsolate, and quite unsuccessful; and then we did what seemed a very silly thing. We rigged up the dummy afresh and sat in the same hide. This seemed silly for two reasons. Firstly, it was scarcely likely that the tiger would be taken in by the dummy a second time. But, what was far more important, and what did not occur to us till we had actually taken up our positions, was the fact that, if the tiger did return, he would know where we were because of the episode of the night before.

The spotted deer called shortly after 8 p.m. The jungle at the foot of the knoll we had climbed that morning resounded to their sharp, frightened cries of alarm: 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!' A stag started first, and then the others took it up. 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!'

Undoubtedly they had seen or smelt the tiger. This caused our morale to rise greatly. At least he was still here and had not gone away. But not a sound did we hear from the tiger himself, or from his partner, the lone jackal.

Ten o'clock came, and once more it seemed the predetermined hour for the curtain to rise on the tiger's activities. From a direction a little to the south of us we heard an agonizing, pitiful scream; a shriek that was but twice repeated, ending on a muffled, sobbing note. An animal had just been done to death; probably a spotted deer or a young sambar. The tiger had succeeded in finding his meal. We made a mental note of the approximate direction from which the sound had come.

After that nothing happened for the rest of the night, nor did the spotted deer call again. Ananthaswamy fell asleep after two o'clock, while I could hardly keep my eyes open. But just had to remain awake. For both of us to go to sleep would have been very dangerous indeed.

As soon as it was light enough to see, we left the hide and started walking in the direction of the death-call of the previous night. If we were very lucky we might flush the tiger while still on his kill. But there was only one thing wrong with this plan. We had no idea where

the kill really was or where to look for it. We searched till nearly nine o'clock. Then the sun began to get hot, and I was very tired. I had not slept the whole night and had slept only half the night before that. So we went back to the bungalow.

Ananthaswamy started to cook his *ragi* balls, which I had begun to look upon more as cannon balls than anything else. Without waiting for this frightful food, I went to sleep. It was after one o'clock in the afternoon when I awoke to find an unusually large *ragi* ball left thougtfully beside me on a plate with a bowl of tea that had gone quite cold. Ananthaswamy was curled up asleep in the further corner of the room. Resignedly, I nibbled at the glutinous, tasteless mess. If only it had a little sugar with it, or even salt. I turned to the cold tea and emptied the bowl. At least it had some flavour.

Walking out on the verandah of the bungalow, I looked hopefully towards the south. No vultures circled in the sky. There was not a clue to lead us to the kill of the night before. And that meant that again we could not plan any definite line of action for the coming hours of darkness.

For one fact I was grateful, however. Even if the deer the tiger had killed had been a fairly small one, and he had consumed it all, the chances were that he would linger for another twenty-four hours in the vicinity before hunger again drove him out to seek another kill.

It was too late for me to walk the ten miles back to Joldahl, purchase a live bait, and bring it back to tie up before nightfall. That, I determined, was what I would do the following day. For that night there seemed nothing better to do than sit once again in our old hide near the spring, changing the position of the dummy this time. Meanwhile, as it was not yet two o'clock and the caretaker was still asleep. I decided to spend the next two hours of the afternoon in walking along some of the game-trails that led into the foothills surrounding the little bungalow.

I was sure the tiger had killed the night before, for both Ananthaswamy and I had heard the victim's death-cry. If only I could locate the spot before nightfall and sit up over it, there was reasonable certainty that the tiger would return.

With this idea in mind I once more walked south towards the hillock from which that dying scream had sounded. This time I approached it from another angle, my attention divided between scanning any ground sandy enough to show pug-marks and looking around for vultures or even a crow perched on a tree to indicate the spot where the tiger had hidden the carcass. And all the time I had to watch carefully where I was walking, avoiding passing too close to a thicket or bush that might conceal a tiger lying in wait behind it.

For just as certainly as I was hunting him, the tiger, being a man-

eater, would hunt me. It was a game in which neither could afford to make the slightest error, which would mean not only the end of the game but the end of the one that made it. Such caution made my progress very slow. Eventually I reached a sandy *nullah* that wound around the base of the hillock. Here I stopped and turned to my left to follow the *nullah* for a short distance to see if the tiger had crossed it. After a while I saw pug-marks in the sand, but they certainly had not been made the night before. These were at least a week old; perhaps ten days. Disappointed, I crossed the *nullah* and started climbing the hillock.

The ground became pebbly, covered with the red laterite gravel that abounds on so many of the lesser hills throughout Mysore state. Because of this the vegetation became sparse, the undergrowth giving way to isolated 'vallary' plants, dwarf grass, and lantana mixed with prickly pear growing intermittently. I was glad of it because the tiger could no longer spring a surprise on me in this comparatively open terrain. By the same token, he would not have brought his kill up here, for there was nowhere to hide it. So it was useless for me to continue my search. When I looked at my watch I was surprised to find it was 3.20 p.m. I would have to hurry back, for we should arrange the dummy and be in our hide by five.

The return journey was quicker, for I did not look for pug-marks or vultures although I certainly continued to give a wide berth to large clumps of bushes or grass behind which the tiger might be hiding. It was just after four when I got back to a very anxious Ananthaswamy. Fortunately he had prepared some fresh tea, which I drank gratefully, although I could not respond to his invitation to try another *ragi* ball. We titivated the dummy a little and carried it back to the stream. This time we did not put it at the edge of the pool, but on the grassy patch about twenty yards from our hide. This particular spot had no merit beyond being a few yards closer to our zareba, behind which we settled ourselves shortly after five.

Knowing that, in spite of the hours he had already slept that afternoon, Ananthaswamy would fall asleep again by midnight, I asked him to keep watch till seven, when it would be dark, while I took a short nap to prepare myself for an all-night vigil. Thus it came about that I was deprived on that occasion, of listening to the full-throated notes of the birds of the day gradually fall into diminuendo, giving place to the crescendo of calls of the birds and beasts of the night.

I awoke tardily, with the caretaker shaking my shoulder. Above me, in the clear velvety sky, the stars twinkled serenely. It was inky dark and I knew that Anathaswamy had had compassion on me and let me sleep beyond the time at which I had told him to awaken me. I

glanced at my watch. It was 8.12 p.m. Gently, and as soundlessly as possible, I sat up.

And then I heard it. Although far away, the sound carried clearly in the cool night air: 'Ba-oooh-ah! Ba-oooh-ah!'

Involuntarily, instinctively, my hand closed on the stock of my rifle, as the old, frightening thoughts, born of the age-old jungle rumour, once more impinged themselves on my mind. The ghastly partners were on the prowl again. Would that uncanny jackal guide the tiger to us, just as he had done two nights previously?

The answer came, almost like a spoken reply to my unvoiced thoughts: 'A-oongh! O-o-n-ooh! Aungh-ha! Aungh-ha!'

The tiger was roaring, and his voice came from exactly the same direction as had that of the lone jackal, hardly a couple of minutes earlier. The jungle-folk sounded the alarm in every direction. To the north and beyond the bungalow a sambar stag bellowed his deep-throated nasal warning, beginning with a startled 'Ponk!,' then 'Whee-onk! Whee-onk!' Finally he settled down to voicing a steady alarm-call that floated across the hills and far, far away: 'Dhank! Dhank! Dhank!' Far closer to us a muntjac, or barking-deer, uttered the hoarse, almost dog-like bark which has given him his name: 'Kharr! Kharr! Kharr!'

Hearing the calls of fear, a spotted deer hind, hidden in the thickets behind us, screamed her preliminary warning, a grating, sharp, whistling-like sound; 'Phrew! Phrew!' Then the stag, leader of the heard, took it up with a startled 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!' Even a peacock, roosting and fast asleep on some distant bough, was disturbed. 'Pe-haun! Pe-haun!', he squawked as he awakened, changing to his usual 'Mia-a-oo! Aaow! Mia-a-oo!'

The whole jungle was alarmed and alert. The frogs in the pool ceased their croaking. Even the crickets in the damp grass stopped chirping. Every living creature, big or small, thinks and knows the same thing: Beware! Tiger! Danger!

But for us there was no fleeing. We were there with a set purpose —to destroy the man-eater. With tensed nerves and muscles we awaited the drama that was to be played out in the next few minutes or hours.

The cries of alarm died away in the distance as the animals that uttered them made for safer regions, as far as possible from the presence of that striped terror which to them, as to every living creature at that moment, spelled violent death. The jungle fell into a silence that was full of menace. I thought about Ananthaswamy's feeble two-cell torch, the light from which had become even weaker after the use we had lately given it. It was the one and only means of showing up the tiger to enable me to take a shot.

Nothing happened. An hour passed, an hour of utter, complete

silence. Even the frogs and crickets had not begun their relatively homely noises again. More time passed, and with the lessening of tension I stole a glance at my watch. It was 10.5 p.m. and I was feeling inordinately hungry.

Then the hair at the back of my neck seemed of its own volition to stand on end. Ananthaswamy's cold and clammy hand reached out to catch my arm. He was trembling violently.

Pitter-patter. Pitter-patter. Pitter-patter. The noise came from behind us this time, once again in the undergrowth. The same undergrowth in which we were hiding, protected by our flimsy cage. Some animal was walking swiftly over the carpet of dried leaves that covered the ground. A few twigs snapped as it forced its way through the bushes and shrubs.

What could it be? Certainly not the tiger. The footfalls were too light, too swift. Could it be the lone jackal showing the way once more? Wistfully I longed for the little mongrel that yapped and so, perhaps, saved our lives only forty-eight hours before. Alas, we had made certain he would not again interfere at a critical time by locking him in the caretaker's room.

Then silence fell again. The glow from the stars enabled me to distinguish the dummy faintly, only twenty yards away: a dim, white object, almost invisible to my tired eyes. It was impossible to penetrate the undergrowth behind us from which the pitter-pattering sound had come.

After a while we heard the quick light footsteps scampering to our right, south of where we were sitting. Again silence and then a grey, wraith-like shape seemed to flit across the grass in front of us, and between us and the dummy. It seemed rather small, and it moved in a swift, peculiarly jerky, manner. It came to a stop almost opposite us.

The reflected glow of the stars did not shed enough light to enable me to see clearly what the animal was up to. It seemed suddenly to shrink to half its size, but I realized this was because the creature had turned to face us. What was apparently the head seemed to bob up and down quickly as the eyes strove to pierce the screen of undergrowth that hid us, to determine what manner of creatures we were.

One thing was certain: our position was no longer secret. The animal knew there was something or someone behind the camouflage. This was corroborated by the fact that it took no notice whatever of the dummy. It had turned its back upon the dummy and was staring at us intently.

The next moment I not only heard the cry of the lone jackal but saw the animal raise his head towards the sky to utter it: 'Ba-oooh-ah!

Ba-oooh-ah!'

Immediately after, as if galvanized into action, the jackal sped some yards away, where it stopped abruptly, turned around and stared intently in our direction.

So interested had I been in this animal's movements that it was Ananthaswamy's hand, squeezing my arm in a vice-like, painful grip, that made me half-turn my head towards him. And as I did so, my glance took in an apparition that momentarily paralysed me with shock. On the very spot where the jackal had been but a second before was a beast of apparently colossal size. In that unreal light it looked as big as a horse.

I knew that I was gazing at the tiger as he stood before us in the grass, broadside on, looking at us intently, just as the jackal had done a moment earlier.

Twice I nudged Ananthaswamy, hard and quickly. It was the prearranged signal for him to shine his torch on the animal. There was no response. The caretaker could not move. Ruefully I realized that once more he had failed me just when I needed his help. I nudged him again, with the same lack of response. With closed fist I pummelled him. But Ananthaswamy just sat and gaped. I cursed myself for having left my own torch behind. But how could I have foreseen events as they happened?

The tiger spotted my movement. Or he may have heard the infinitesimal sound of my fist on Ananthaswamy's thigh. He growled menacingly and his silhouette grew smaller and seemed to merge with the grass. I knew he had sunk to the ground preparatory to charging upon us. Two or three bounds and he would be on top of us, through the unprotected front of our hide.

The tiger's action and my conclusions were almost simultaneous. Perhaps it all took less than ten seconds.

Grabbing the torch from the caretaker's nerveless fingers, I pressed the button even before I had aligned it against the barrel of my rifle. The beam certainly did not show up my foresight, but did shine directly into the tiger's eyes. Although it was a far from powerful light, the tiger baulked appreciably. Perhaps it associated the light with the surprise it had received two nights earlier, when it had leapt upon the dummy. Whatever caused it to hesitate gave me the split-second I needed to put the bead of the foresight in a direct line between the backsight and the gleaming eyes.

Such a shot is by no means ideal, particularly as I was holding both torch and rifle together with my left hand. If placed too high, the bullet was apt to glance off the receding forehead of the tiger. But there was no time for anything else, and I squeezed the trigger.

The report of the rifle was followed by an ear-splitting roar as the

tiger reared on its hind feet, its front paws clawing at its smashed face. Feverishly I worked the under-lever and fired into the exposed white fur of its chest.

It came down to earth after that, floundering around blindly while clods of mud and grass were torn up by the threshing talons as they struck wildly into the ground, and by the gaping jaws as they bit savagely in agony. Roar after roar rent the air, while I fired every bullet the magazine held. Losing count of my shots, I heard the click of the firing-pin against the empty chamber. The tiger was still writhing and squirming, but the roars had given place to a gurgle, the unmistakable death-rattle of an expiring tiger.

'Hold the torch.' I whispered hurriedly, thrusting it into the caretaker's numbed hand, while I feverishly loaded three rounds into the magazine.

I could just see the heaving flank of the tiger as it lay on its side in the long grass. The gurgle became irregular. Suddenly it ceased and I knew the tiger was dead. We waited another fifteen minutes, but there was no further movement.

The lone jackal never reappeared. Perhaps he knew by instinct that he had led his partner to his death and was sorry. Maybe he hurried away after that to find another partner, remembering that the association had hitherto brought him easy and big dividends.

We examined the tiger carefully next morning. He was a very old male with worn canines. But apart from that he appeared to have no other defects. What had turned him against the human race? Maybe it was just a whim in the first place. Perhaps he had felt old age creeping up on him and had discovered a convenient way of procuring his food. Possibly it was the jackal that had in the first place tempted him by leading him to easy prey—the caretaker's unfortunate daughter. Who can tell?

Two

The Evil One of Umbalmeru

The golden-brown of the jungle grasses, mellowed at first by the rains and then burnt dry by the merciless heat of the midday sun, covers the sides of the sloping hills that appear to have raised themselves haphazardly in this jungly corner of the land. At the base of each hill, narrow, sharp valleys have been formed by the rain-water during centuries of storms that have burst against the steeper heights and then cascaded in turbulent, muddy streams down the jungle-clad slopes to the valleys below, where, joining together, they have eventually formed the northeastern branch of the little Kalyani river.

These small valleys are choked with undergrowth: cane-bamboo, lantana and the clinging vines of the 'killer' creeper, which certainly has earned its name.

Years ago some little bird may have eaten a few of its brown berries and had then rested on a leafy perch. The meat of the berries was soon assimilated, and the little bird passed out the undigested seeds. One such seed would have fallen at the foot of the mighty tree where it had rested. Then the rains came and the little seed sprouted and a baby 'killer' was born, no bigger at first than the nail on your little finger.

But the seedling grows apace and puts out its tendrils when a month old, thus revealing itself for the first time as a plant that creeps and supports its weight on other plants and trees. It grows and grows, and by the end of the first year it has perhaps climbed a third of the way up the big tree which has sheltered it. But its stem is still no thicker than your middle finger. Within two years it has reached the top of the tree, whence its tendrils reach out hungrily towards the neighbouring forest giants, all of them, like the host tree, possibly two or three centuries old. And the stem of the creeper is now about the thickness of your wrist.

The years roll by and the creeper has completely covered and enmeshed the old tree that supports it. The stem, which was as thick as your finger and then your wrist, has now become as thick as your thigh, and it continues to grow till it becomes as thick as your body. Its weight is colossal. It has wound even tighter around the trunk and branches of its host, biting through the soft outer bark into the very heart of the wood.

Slowly, inexorably, it strangles its host to death. Years later the rains and storms come again. Perhaps on a night very similar to the

one on which the 'killer' was born, the grand old tree that had played host to the innocent-looking killer crashes to earth, devoured by the 'baby' to which it once gave shelter. From amid the fallen debris the tendrils of the 'killer' reach out voraciously towards the stems of neighbouring trees, there to repeat the grim story and to earn its name of 'killer' over and over again.

Because of the heavy undergrowth in the narrow valleys, it is impossible for a man, and almost out of the question for an animal of any size to penetrate the leafy tangle. It is the home of rodents and other such tiny creatures, and the many species of snakes that prey upon them. It is always green there, despite the driest summer months and hottest tropical sun. For the weight of the surrounding hills seems to press the moisture out of the very earth itself, to make slushy marshes in the tangled verdure where the crickets chirp all day and there is perpetual twilight. No rays from the sun can penetrate the canopy of greenery. A moment's delay in sprouting and upward thrusting means that the neighbouring bush, vine or shrub has seized the opportunity and the laggard is doomed to an existence of perpetual shade and eventual death from rot and decay.

But above the valleys, on the slopes of the hills, it is different. There the sun beats down mercilessly, and in the summer months the leaves of the trees dry up and fall to the ground to form a rustling carpet upon the earth, till the rains bring decay and turn them into mould to feed the very trees from which they have fallen.

Higher up on the hills it is cooler and rockier: a region of tumbled boulders and lichens and mosses, while orchids hang from boles and branches, and the large blue-black bird, known as the 'whistling schoolboy', thrills the listening ear with his wondrous, rambling, warbling notes, carrying never quite the same melody twice.

It is shortly after midday when my story begins: and the whistling schoolboy, together with most other birds and nearly all the beasts, both large and small, is taking his afternoon siesta under some shady boulder overlooking the crystal-clear icy-cold water that trickles from a crack in the face of a rock at the foot of an overhanging escarpment. Hardly a puff of air can be felt, and the twigs on the trees and the barbed stems of the tall grasses are motionless. It is strangely quiet at this noonday hour. Even the crickets are silent, and not a leaf stirs or rustles in the neighbourhood. It is as if all the world had been lulled into a deep torpor.

But there comes a faint sound after a while, audible above the gentle murmuring of the waters of the stream as they glide over the smoothly-worn, moss-green, slippery rocks that form their bed. It is a staccato, intermittent sound. The noise of someone or something digging, and it comes from the farther bank of the brook and about

fifty yards away.

A human figure can be seen there, crouched on its haunches and almost hidden from view among the huge leaves of the 'elephant-ear' lily that grows in profusion along the banks of the stream. Only the jerky movements, as the man wields his short crowbar, and the sound of the digging itself, betray his presence; for his jet-black body, naked except for a small strip of dirty *loincloth,* blends perfectly with the dark shadows beneath and around the huge leaves of the lilies.

Old Kothanda Reddy has come a long way from his village—the village of Rangampet—nearly twelve miles distant, to dig up the rare bulbs of the kuloo water-plant, famed as an aphrodisiac of rare and magical power, that grow here and there among the giant lilies. He has to search carefully for the kuloo water-plant, with its three-petalled, shamrock-like leaf, so tiny as to be almost completely hidden from view by its huge bedfellow. And when he finds one he has to dig deep into the mire after levering aside the movable stones in order to reach the slender bulbous white roots of the little plant. These roots, when dried thoroughly and later powdered and mixed with male semen and finally treated with magical incantations on the night of the new moon (called 'Amavasa night'), assume their full potency.

It is said that a pinch of this powder, mixed with the loved one's food, or better still administered in coffee without milk and liberally sweetened with jaggery or brown sugar to hide the slightly acrid taste, would so excite the woman as to cause her to throw all modesty to the winds, and incidentally herself, unreservedly and unashamedly, into the arms of her eager and already-prepared lover. The concoction evidently has some value—or at least a reputation for value—for old Kothanda Reddy had been selling it for some years for one rupee per pinch. He is secretly proud of the number of illegitimate children in the village of Rangampet—living testimonials in his opinion to the efficacy of the kuloo roots.

So Kothanda Reddy bends himself to the task and digs deeply, while the dull and intermittent sound of his crowbar is almost drowned, but not quite, by the gurgling and burbling sounds from the hurrying waters of the rivulet. And being thus engrossed he does not notice the malevolently cruel eyes that glare down upon him from a point immediately above and higher up the bank of the rocky little rill.

The creature that watches him makes not the slightest sound that might betray its presence. No growl of any sort issues from the cavernous chest and throat. Nor do the eyes blink once in their searching and merciless gaze.

The point of the crowbar finally lays bare the tender white roots. Old Kothanda Reddy sets it aside and stoops forward to reach with

both hands into the hole he has made to disentangle the roots from the surrounding ooze.

The silent watcher above, who has been observing his every movement, notices the action and knows that the man, with his head bent forward and downward, cannot possibly see it now. A red tongue swiftly licks the lips of the upper jaw. Then the creature crouches lower before committing the first of a series of murders that will give it the name of the 'Evil One' in a score of villages and hamlets that border the three forest ranges known as the Bhakarapet Reserve, the Chamala valley, and the Mamandur High Range forests of the Chittoor district, now belonging to the state of Andhra Pradesh.

A moment later the deed is done. Kothanda Reddy never saw the massive form that hurtled through the air and down upon him, although for a second he did feel its stupendous weight, and the agony from the deep wounds inflicted by its talons as they embedded themselves in his exposed back and sides. But that was only for a moment, because the next instant powerful jaws, armed with massive fangs, crunched through his neck and the back of his skull. So Kothanda Reddy died, and he did not know the moment of his passing to another realm where aphrodisiacs are not in demand and the kuloo roots have no value.

It was quite a long time before the old man was missed at Rangampet. It had been his habit to wander off into the jungle to look for his mysterious roots and herbs, or go on a round of the neighbouring villages to sell his concoctions and magical powders and charms and amulets which had spread his reputation far and wide as a great magician or *mantramkara,* as he was called. And when eventually he was missed his bones were never found to associate his passing with the Evil One. But, weeks later, two wandering forest guards, who had climbed the slopes of the hill and stopped at the little brook for a drink of its icy-cold water, noticed the crowbar and beside it a dirty cloth bag that had been partly devoured by termites which, however, had not eaten the evil-looking and mouldering roots that now spilled out and lay scattered on the moist ground of the streambed. Then they remembered that Kothanda Reddy had been missing for quite a long while, causing some people to say he had left Rangampet suddenly and for good. Now, for the first time, the forest guards knew why he had never returned.

The tragedy had evidently taken place quite a long while before, and there were no traces to indicate the nature or identity of his murderer. The forest guards duly reported their find to the police *chowki* at Rangampet, where a note was made of what they had said.

No very definite or proper record was kept of the activities of the Evil One, at least at the beginning of its career; but reports say that

the next event occurred in the following manner.

It was again afternoon and around three o'clock, when a line of seven bullock-carts were returning from the jungle along the rough forest track that led to Rangampet from a well seven miles away in the jungle at a place called Pulibonu. About a quarter-of-a-mile off the roadway, and almost opposite the fourth milestone from the village, is a perennial water hole known as Narasimha Cheruvu. The seven men halted their carts beside the fourth milestone and descended the two furlongs to the water hole, chatting as they went, to wash their faces and hands and legs in the limpid, lukewarm brown water, and then their mouths by the simple process of holding a handful of water to their lips, gargling without swallowing it, and ejecting it into the pool.

Finally, the seven men squatted down beneath a *babul* tree near the water's edge for a brief smoke of *beedies.* The *beedies* finished, they got up and returned to their carts in single file. They reached the carts all right. At least, six of them did— but there was no sign of the seventh man. What could he be about, and where had he got to? His half-dozen companions, with the stoical indifference and patience of the Indian villager, time being of no consequence anyhow, sat down at the roadside to wait for him and smoke some more *beedies.* Idly one of them remarked that Puttoo Reddy, the missing cartman, had been walking last in the file. The speaker had happened to turn around for a moment and had noticed Puttoo Reddy stop to light a *beedi.* He was a very heavy smoker.

Time passed and the missing man did not put in an appearance. It would have been safe to wait for him indefinitely under normal circumstances. But if they now dallied too long it would be dark before they were out of the jungle and among the fields surrounding Rangampet. That did not appeal to them.

They began to call him: 'Puttoo Reddy! Hurry up, man; where the devil are you?'—'Puttoo Reddy!'—'Puttoo Reddy!' Puttoo Reddy did not appear.

Panic seized the six cartmen. It was unthinkable to go back the short distance to the water hole to look for their missing companion. Perhaps some evil spirit had seized him. Maybe a snake had bitten him. Perhaps he had been taken by a tiger. Or a panther. Or a bear. But the majority of them ascribed his disappearance to supernatural agencies.

Within a few moments each of them had scrambled into his bullock-cart and the six pairs of bullocks rattled off with their carts as fast as they could, urged on by constant whipping. Left alone at the fourth milestone was the seventh cart— Puttoo Reddy's, the bulls waiting patiently for their owner. He never came.

During the night it grew cold and the dew was heavy. The two

bulls that were still yoked to the cart forgot their owner and remembered their dry, cosy stalls at Rangampet. They travelled through the night and reached the village at about 4 a.m. There could be no tigers about, for they were unmolested.

Nevertheless Puttoo Reddy—just like Kothanda Reddy before him—had apparently vanished into thin air without leaving a trace. When a third man, and then a fourth, disappeared within the next two months, people began to say the Chamala Valley was haunted by an 'Evil One', who left no evidence of his coming or of his going, except that he took a human being with him on each occasion.

The third victim was a petty trader who had been driving a pack of ten or twelve donkeys, laden with gram, from Rangampet to a small hamlet thirteen miles away to the northwest. He had been seen eating his midday meal at the well at Pulibonu, which was just beyond the seventh milestone along this track. In fact, he had requested one of a number of bamboo-cutters who had been camped there to draw some water for him from the well, as he had no rope. The man had obliged and the petty merchant had drunk his fill. Then he had been seen reloading his donkeys and had finally moved off, driving them before him.

The following day some other travellers, coming from the opposite direction, had found the pack of donkeys scattered but browsing contentedly in the vicinity of the tenth milestone. They were still carrying the sacks of gram on their backs. But there was no trace of their owner.

The fourth man to vanish had done so at Pulibonu itself. And by a quirk of fate he was the very bamboo-cutter who had obliged by drawing water from the well for the owner of the donkeys. A party of cutters, engaged on contract to fell bamboos in what is known as a 'coupe' in the vicinity of Pulibonu itself, had been camping there for over a month. Just a few days after he had obliged the vanished merchant, this very bamboo-cutter had assembled with his companions beside the Pulibonu well to eat his midday meal and drink water. Thereafter all of them had returned to their respective tasks. But later in the evening, when the day's work was over, he had not rejoined his companions in the small huts they had temporarily built close to the roadside. Nor was he ever seen again.

The other bamboo-cutters had not immediately panicked. In fact, the following morning they set out in a body to look for him. They had come to the place where he had been lopping bamboos. A short distance away they had found his *koitha* or chopping-knife. Close to it was the white cloth of his turban where it had fallen off, still shaped to his head. It looked just as if he had taken off the turban carefully and set it aside on the ground, rather than as if it had fallen off.

Spreading out fanwise, his companions had thoroughly searched the jungle, the ground, even the leaves of the trees and blades of grass for a clue to his mysterious disappearance. If he had been attacked and killed by a wild animal there would surely be some traces, a smear of blood, a pug-mark, or a drag-mark where his body had been hauled through the undergrowth. But there were none of these things.

It looked as if he had just taken off his turban deliberately and neatly, laid it on the ground, and then decided to vanish into thin air. But no one would, or could, do that, and in the absence of any trace of violence, the only other conclusion that could be reached—at least in the minds of the other bamboo-cutters—was that supernatural agencies had once again been at work and had whisked away their companion just like the petty merchant before him, and the cartman before that. Even their reputed village magician, Kothanda Reddy, had been helpless before these evil spirits or spirit— this Evil One—which had now come into their jungles, and had come apparently to stay.

Once panic had seized the inhabitants of Rangampet, it gripped them in real earnest. From alarm it soon turned into terror, and it spread through all the villages. The police were alerted, as were the officials of the Forest department. Even the Collector at Chittoor was informed. But the ancients living in Rangampet wagged their heads sadly, if not amusedly. What could the police and other officials do against the Evil One?

Obviously, the only remedy was to appease the Evil One. And the only method of appeasement was by sacrifice—by blood! The police officials in the vicinity grew apprehensive. When the question of sacrifice in a case such as this arose, it was a moot point whether the frightened villagers would consider the life of an animal, such as a fowl or a goat, which were the creatures generally used for a sacrificial ceremony, of sufficient importance to propitiate this Evil Spirit that now haunted the jungle. They might get the impression that a sacrifice of a higher order was called for. A human sacrifice; perhaps a child. Such things had happened before.

So the police *daffedar* (head constable, who ranked as a sergeant) incharge of the tiny Police *Chowki* at Rangampet warned Krishnappa Reddy—the new village voodoo-man, magician and witch-doctor combined, upon whose shoulders the mantle of old Kothanda Reddy had automatically fallen as he was the only eligible candidate in the vicinity—that they would lock him up and then hang him if any of the village children were found missing.

Faced with this curb to his professional activities, Krishnappa Reddy was not easily upset. Whatever conclusion he reached is not known. It was not long afterwards that Adiraj, the nine-year-old son of a Harijan woman named Adima, who was of the 'scavenger' or

'sweeper' class, was reported by his mother as missing from the town of Chandragiri.

Now Chandragiri is hardly six miles from Rangampet, and is the headquarters of the district. A weekly market-fair, called a *shandy* , is held there every Monday. The people from the surrounding villages are in the habit of attending this weekly shandy to buy such provisions and other odds and ends as are not procurable in their own hamlets. What was more to the point, Krishnappa Reddy had been seen by several people at the *shandy* on a Monday morning. The small boy, Adiraj, had slept the previous Sunday night beside his mother. On Monday morning he had told her he intended to wander off to the *shandy* to see what was to be seen, and he had not been seen by anyone after that.

It was not till Friday that Adima screwed up enough courage to report to the police that her son had been missing since Monday morning. The sub-inspector, hot on the scent, requisitioned a *jutka* —a two-wheeled conveyance drawn by a pony—and ordered the driver to make his pony go at a gallop all the six miles to the hamlet of Rangampet. There he searched Krishnappa Reddy's hut very painstakingly, hoping to find some clue to the missing lad's fate—perhaps a bloodstained cloth or knife, or some part of his anatomy, such as his liver or heart or other organs, as these are known to play an important role in sacrificial rights. But he found nothing.

Very indignant and disappointed at his failure, the annoyed sub-inspector took Krishnappa Reddy back to Chandragiri in handcuffs and kept him there over a week. But nobody had come forward to say they had seen him talking to the missing boy, Adiraj. Worse still, nobody could be found who would at least say he thought he had seen the man and the child together. After all, remember, Krishnappa Reddy was a magician! Suppose he laid a curse upon the man or woman who volunteered such witness, false or true, against him?

So on the ninth morning the sub-inspector released the magician and told him to walk back the six miles to his village, where he was to remain and not leave without the permission of the police. To this Krishnappa Reddy had said enigmatically: 'The fox is cunning; but can he outwit a jackal?'

The sub-inspector pondered over those words for several days. Had he been alluded to as the jackal? Or was he only the fox? Whatever fate befell Adiraj was never known. But if he had, indeed, been used as a secret sacrifice, apparently the Evil One would have no part of him. For within a week the fifth victim disappeared.

This time it was a woman. And she vanished near the turning where the footpath, leading to a *nullah* named Ragimankonar, branches off the road from Rangampet to Pulibonu. This turning is

within three miles of the village.

The woman, whose name was Venkatamma, had prepared the midday meal for her husband, who had left earlier in the morning with their cattle to graze them in the jungle where he had grazing rights. She set forth at noon to take the meal to the rendezvous they had agreed upon before he left—the sacred peepul tree that grew on the bank of the Ragimankonar *nullah,* where it dropped some thirty feet into a wide sandy hollow where water only gathered during the rainy season.

The man grew angry, because he was hungry; and his anger increased in direct proportion to his hunger, when his spouse never showed up with the long-overdue midday meal. He decided to beat the lazy wench soundly when she did appear. That would encourage her to be more prompt in future.

But the beating never took place. Venkatamma never came to receive it.

It was a highly indignant and furious grazier who drove the herd home much earlier than usual that afternoon, both to eat a belated lunch and to administer the thrashing his wife would long remember, instead of just a normal beating, which was the usual corrective. Once again he was doomed to disappointment. There was no lunch awaiting him—and no Venkatamma. His little daughter told him that mother had left exactly at noon, carrying the meal in an earthen 'chatty' pot.

Some days later searchers found the *chatty* pot lying broken beside the footpath less than half-a-mile from the peepul tree beneath which the herdsman had been waiting all afternoon. But of Venkatamma there was not a trace.

I came one day with an Indian friend to camp for a week at the Forest Bungalow at Nagapatla, which is built near the outskirts of the jungle one mile from Rangampet, on the track that led to Pulibonu. The manner of my coming and the purpose of my visit on that occasion had certainly been unusual. Although I had brought my rifle and gun as a matter of course, we had not planned a serious hunting trip. My friend, Deva Sundram, was in trouble, and I had brought him to Nagapatla to help him out of it. For, of all things, Deva Sundram had contracted whooping-cough, and by his own admission he was thirty-eight years of age.

I know little of sicknesses and far less of doctoring. But I understand that whooping-cough is a child's complaint and seldom, if ever, affects adults. Nevertheless, Deva Sundram had most certainly contracted it in real earnest from his own little son. All the known remedies had apparently not helped the poor man, nor had they allayed his fits of coughing and wheezing and whooping. I had happened to visit him one evening at his home in Bangalore. He was

crouched on a sofa, his eyes popping out of his head, spluttering and making strange noises in his throat. Between spasms he waved me frantically away and stuttered: 'Go away. I have whooping-cough. If you come near me you will catch it. Go away—go away.' His wife anxiously explained that they had tried every remedy on the market and several doctors, but Dev seemed to be getting worse.

Now it so transpired that not so many years previously my own daughter, June, and son, Donald, had contracted whooping cough. I had planned to go to Nagapatla on a hunting trip about that time. My wife, who is a bit of a nurse, had thought that the dry, hot climate of the place would shorten the malady and suggested we take the children along. We did so, and she had been right. Both of them had stopped whooping within forty-eight hours.

I mentioned this to Mrs. Sundram. Dev ceased trying to choke to death long enough to listen. Being a lover of the jungle himself, he had just been able to stutter: 'Capital; let's start today,' when off he went into another paroxysm of whooping. It was rather funny to watch him and I could barely repress a smile. Later, he told me he did not think much of my sense of humour.

However, as a result of all this, we left for Nagapatla the following morning in the T Model Ford I owned in those days. We left Bangalore rather early in order not to expose Dev to the chill of the night air. For the Model T, in spite of all its virtues, is not a fast-moving vehicle, and we would never have reached Nagapatla till late at night, the distance being about 170 miles. By leaving in the morning and chugging along at an average twenty miles an hour, stopping now and then to pour water into the radiator, and for lunch, we got to the bungalow shortly before five in the evening. It was noticeably warm even then, and Dev was delighted that I had suggested coming to this place. In spite of the long and somewhat uncomfortable and bumpy journey on the hard springs of the Model T, he had been coughing less since the time we had reached low country after passing Chittoor.

Eating dinner by lantern-light on the wide verandah of the thatched bungalow, I began to chat to the 'bungalow-keeper', a humble servant of the Forest department and an old friend of mine, and asked him for *jungly khubbar,* the latest news of what had been happening in the jungles surrounding the little bungalow.

He was absolutely bursting with excitement and in a torrent of speech began to tell of the exploits of the Evil One that had come to the forest during the past few months and had accounted for the disappearance of five people already.

Mixed with what he had picked up in the way of rumours, and his own conjectures, plus the centuries-old background of superstition

and the tales of witchcraft he had learned as a child, the old bungalow watcher told us an interesting and romantic tale, filled with fantastic details of how each of the five victims had disappeared.

Dev and I were thrilled; and to make it even more thrilling as we listened, a panther began its sawing call as it walked down to the Kalyani river that skirted the forest less than half a mile from where we were sitting. 'Ah-hah! Ah-hah!' he called, uttering a sound almost exactly like someone sawing wood, only it was far louder and deeper.

By his calls we could follow the movements of the panther in our minds, padding softly from bamboo-clump to *muthee* tree, and from the sheltering bushes through the long grasses to the waving belt of rushes that border the banks of the Kalyani and its softly rippling stream of water, that speeds on its way through the dense, silent and mysterious labyrinths of the darkened forest, with only the stars in a velvety-black sky to cast their reflections upon the restless current.

We tried sleeping inside the bungalow that night, but it was far too hot, with not a breath of air to relieve the stifling atmosphere. Further, the gambolling rats in the grass thatch above our heads squeaked as they chased one another about. Suddenly one of them cried out in fright and then pain. We were both lying awake on the hard-boarded cots that furnished the room. The rat had squealed loudly and pitifully for a few seconds and then stopped. Dev asked me if I could think why it had cried out. To me the answer was only too obvious. It had been bitten, caught, and was now in the process of being swallowed by some snake which had crawled into the thatch for that very purpose.

When I told him this, Dev scrambled out of bed and suggested pulling the cots on to the verandah. I thought that a good idea, too. The verandah was not only cooler, but it had a zinc roof where rats would not gambol all night, and snakes would not pursue them.

We fell asleep after that, and Dev did not disturb me much during the night. His cough was already better.

'Whe-e-e-ew! Kuck-kaya-kaya-khuck'm.' It was the old familiar call of the junglecock that awoke me next morning, just as the false dawn was fading, to give way to a short renewed spell of darkness. Then came the real dawn, spreading over the eastern horizon, to outline the distant jungle-clad hills in all the glories of shell-pink, vermilion, red and indigo blue, blending into peacock green, tinged with yellow, orange and purple. I had watched many dawns and sunsets before, but I have never tired of seeing another as the golden orb of the rising sun dispels the wreaths of mist that rise from the rich damp mould of the forest.

'Cock-a doodle-doo.' The cry came from south of the bungalow, where the hamlet of Rangampet nestled a mile away. The village

rooster, hearing the challenge of his jungle cousin, could not resist the impulse to reply, although nearly two miles of cultivated lands divided them. The forest, a mile to the north, awoke to the new life of another day as Deva Sundram shook his sleepy head and raised himself on his elbows to listen.

'Mia-a-oo. Mia-oo,' called a peacock, fresh from roosting on some far distant forest tree. Spotted dear, frightened by something, insistently cried, 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!' Perhaps the panther we had heard the night before was returning homewards and had alarmed them.

I fried some bacon on my primus stove, which we ate with the *chappatties* we had brought from Bangalore, while waiting for the hot water to boil for the special coffee that Dev said he was going to make that morning. And he carried out his promise. It was delicious.

We took a walk into the jungle a little later, going as far as the peepul tree on the bank of Ragimankonar, near which the woman, Venkatamma, had so mysteriously disappeared. I scanned the ground on the outward journey and the sandy bed of the *nullah* at Ragimankonar itself, to see what animals had passed in the night. We picked up the trail of the panther as soon as we came to the bank of the Kalyani River. He had been a large male. A mile further on a female sloth bear had rested under a *jumlum* tree, while her two cubs had frolicked around her. Their tiny childlike footpads were quite distinct on the sand. Isolated sambar, spotted deer and wild-pig tracks showed the other beasts that had been abroad during the hours of darkness.

But I entirely failed to find what I had particularly sought and had hoped to discover: tiger pugs. No tiger had passed that way. Dev and I returned to the bungalow, swallowed more coffee and then walked southwards to Rangampet. We wanted to hear other versions of the strange tale that old Dadoo, the bungalow-keeper, had recounted over our dinner the previous night. Both the *patel* and village *munsiff* made us welcome with more coffee, and the villagers clustered around. The advent of visitors, especially from afar, was always an occasion for a chat.

'The Evil One, *dorailu?'* queried an ancient, bent and tottering and leaning on his staff. 'Aye, he is in the jungle in real earnest, and has taken five people already. But he will never fall to your firearms, sirs, for he will never give you a chance by appearing before you. He is cunning—very, very cunning indeed. Although your bullets would have no effect on him even should he show himself, he will never do that. For you are strangers, foreigners, and different from us. But he will lurk in the jungle, hiding behind a bush or in a hole in the ground, or perhaps he will shrink to the size of a beetle and climb to

the top of a lofty tree, where he will watch, watch for one of us; man, woman or child, whoever happens to pass alone. Then in the twinkling of an eye he will change in size and shape. From a tiny beetle he will become a giant ogre. He will seize the unfortunate and eat him up and leave not a trace behind. It will go on like this till we are all taken or leave this accursed forest to him and never enter it again.'

The throng of onlookers nodded their heads in melancholy agreement. Face to face with such deep superstition, we felt very helpless indeed. I tried to appear disdainful and said: 'Nonsense, ancient one; I am surprised that a man of your years and wisdom should talk like a little child. Doubtless it is a tiger or panther that has turned man-eater and is causing all the mischief.'

He smiled superciliously. 'Man-eaters, *dorailu,* I have met before. When I was a youth one attacked me at the foot of the escarpment beyond Umbalmeru. Fortunately I was carrying a wood-cutter's axe at the time and threw it at the brute. By still greater luck the blade struck it full between the eyes. That tiger's liver turned to water that day. It whirled around and fled. So I am here to tell the tale. Ho. Ho. Ho.' He cackled toothlessly at the recollection of the incident.

'But this is entirely different, sir,' he went on. 'Look: you know something about tigers and panthers, and we know you are a hunter who has visited these forests before. Have you ever met a tiger or a panther that leaves no pug-marks; no trail of any kind? Not a drop of blood is to be found where

any of the five victims were taken. Not even a drag-mark, where he pulls or carries their bodies into the jungle. If there is a tiger in these parts just now, particularly a man-eater, would we not have found his tracks in the forest, or along the dusty footpaths, in the sandy *nullahs,* or the moist earth on the banks of the Kalyani river? Would we not have heard his moaning calls at night while searching for his prey? And the same goes for a panther, too, although there are some harmless ones around. Resides, as you know well enough, *dorailu,* it is not the habit of a panther to drag his victim very far from the place he kills it. For one thing, he has not the strength.

'Finally, man-eaters invariably strike during the hours of darkness or in the evening, when the shades of night are not far off. But in this case every one of the five victims has been taken in broad daylight, and that, too, in the blazing heat of the noon or afternoon, when all carnivora are resting.

'You can't explain that, can you, *dorailu* ? But I can; and the explanation is simple and obvious. We are up against the Evil One himself—a spirit that can appear and disappear at will, and can assume any form or shape he wishes, from that of an insect to that of

a monster, which he is. Your guns will be useless, sirs. For you are not dealing with any flesh-and-blood tiger or panther. I advise you to go home. Perhaps if you annoy him too much, he may even take one of you; maybe both of you.'

And so saying the ancient again grinned mirthlessly. To signify he had spoken the last word, the old man spat a mouthful of betel-nut and pan-leaf against the foundation of the wall of the *munsiff's* little brick-and-mud villa with unerring aim. There was a chorus of assent and approval from the bystanders. Even the *patel* and the village *munsiff* nodded their heads dolefully.

Dev and I made our way back to Nagapatla in silence. The old man's words rang in my ears. What manner of creature was this that left no pug-marks, no blood-trail, no drag-mark of any kind, that operated in complete silence, that murdered at the hottest hour of the day? No man-eaters in my experience had behaved in this manner. Yet I knew there was no such thing as an evil spirit responsible for the attacks. There must be a rational explanation.

The five people had been done to death at irregular intervals. The common factor in each case was that the killing— or disappearance—of every victim had always taken place soon after midday. Secondly, there had been no other human witness to the incident. The disappearance of Kothanda Reddy was largely a matter of conjecture; but certainly the cart-man, the trader, the bamboo-cutter, and the woman carrying food to her husband, had each been alone. In the case of the petty merchant, his donkeys were with him when it had happened. They, of course, could not speak. Significantly, none of them had been attacked, hurt or killed. And apparently they had not even been alarmed unduly when their owner vanished, for they had all been found grazing closely together the next day. If they had received a fright, they would naturally have scattered in every direction. And most certainly the sudden advent of a tiger, or even a panther, would have scared the wits out of any donkey.

We got back to the bungalow where we prepared our frugal lunch. Dev asked me: 'Jock,'—he always calls me 'Jock' for the twenty-eight years I have known him—'what do you think it is?'

'It can't be anything but a tiger or panther, Dev,' I replied, 'although I must admit it is certainly a peculiar and unusual beast. There are no elephants or bison in this particular forest, and the only other animal that might attack without provocation would be a sloth bear. And a sloth bear is a stupid, clumsy beast. He would certainly have left some sort of trail. Besides he would not have carried away the bodies of his victims. He would have left them where he had killed them.'

After lunch I said to Dev: 'This mystery intrigues me. I would

certainly like to solve it. Tell me, would Leela'—Mrs Deva Sundram —'object to you staying another ten days?'

He was enthusiastic about it. As a matter of fact, since hearing about the Evil One, Dev had completely forgotten his whooping-cough, which had almost subsided anyhow. So each of us wrote to his better half saying we were staying rather longer than originally planned. Although we did not say so, we hoped they would conjecture that Dev's whooping cough attack was the only reason for prolonging our stay.

By three o'clock in the afternoon we were back in the jungle, searching for evidence of a tiger. We found none. We walked up the roadway as far as the fourth milestone and then broke off into the jungle to the east, walking the two furlongs to the water hole known as Narasimha Cheruvu. Even on the muddy edge of the pool we found no tiger pug-marks. A panther had come for water recently and, of course, quite a number of deer of varying sorts.

Instead of returning by the road, we came back along the banks of the Kalyani River. Here we picked up the trail of another panther in several places. He was quite a large beast, and certainly not the animal whose tracks we had found at Narasimha Cheruvu. Perhaps the large panther had been the one that had been calling the previous night.

Of one thing we were now almost certain. No tiger appeared to be in residence at that time in that part of the jungle. But there were definitely two panthers; probably more.

Was one of them a man-eater? If the answer to this question was 'yes', then there was all the more reason that at least in one or more of the five instances of the vanished people, some evidence of the attack should have been found. For a man-eating panther, although a deadly antagonist, lacks the great physical strength of a tiger to carry his human prey away bodily. Occasionally he will begin to eat it on the spot, but generally drags the remains into a thicket to consume them there. In either case there would be ample signs for even almost inexperienced searchers to pick up a trail of some sort.

We were immensely intrigued.

Early next morning we walked the seven miles to Pulibonu and pursued our inquiries at the bamboo-cutters' camp, which was still there. Nobody could suggest a rational explanation, and that some malevolent evil spirit was responsible was the universal belief.

We searched the banks of the Kalyani, the game trails, and the footpaths that bifurcate from Pulibonu. One of these leads in a northwesterly direction, and it was along this track that the petty merchant had parted company with his donkeys. The other footpath branched off towards the northeast, skirted a rocky pool known as

Gundalpenta and led to another pool, named Umbalmeru, at the foot of a lofty, frowning escarpment. It was somewhere in this latter region that the first victim, old Kothanda Reddy, the village wizard, had disappeared.

These two pathways, branching off at Pulibonu, form a letter Y with the main track leading from Rangampet to Pulibonu. We had walked along the tail of this letter Y for the seven miles from the village of Rangampet to Pulibonu. From there we followed each of the top branches of the Y for more than a mile. On the section leading to Umbalmeru we came across the first tiger pug-marks. They were some days old, but they confirmed that at least one tiger was in the area. On both the bifurcating sections, as well as along the tail of the Y, we had seen the pugs of panthers, and the imprints of what was undoubtedly an outstandingly large hyaena, but no tiger tracks whatever.

Dev asked me if I thought the hyaena might be responsible for what had occurred, and I very definitely rejected the suggestion. I had met hyaenas many times and in many places, and had found them not only quite harmless towards human beings, but particularly cowardly. They would eat only carrion, such as the kills of tigers and panthers, or animals that had otherwise died. I have heard rumours of them encroaching on village burial-grounds and exhuming corpses, and I had read once or twice in the newspapers that in certain jungles in Madhya Pradesh they were credited with carrying off children from the outskirts of villages. But in all my experience in southern India I had never heard of even a single case of this sort. The hyaenas of the south appear to confine themselves exclusively to a diet of carrion, excreta of any sort from beast or bird, and filth of every description, together with such small animals as rodents, lizards and nesting birds as they were able to surprise and catch. Once or twice they have been reputed to have attacked goats and sheep.

We were dead-beat when we got back to the bungalow at Nagapatla after dark that evening, having walked a distance of over eighteen miles. And we were ravenously hungry, too. Dev and I slept so soundly that night that the sun was shining brightly the next morning when we awoke.

Three days later our friends, the bamboo-cutters, provided the first tangible clue to the identity of the Evil One. They had finished their felling operations in the *coupe* near the well at Pulibonu, and the bamboo-contractor, who employed them, shifted the whole party to the next *coupe* at which he had secured the right to cut. This *coupe* was at the very end of the right-hand branch of the letter Y, after leaving the main path at Pulibonu. It was within half a mile of the rocky pool that bore the name of Umbalmeru, and almost at the base of the lofty escarpment which formed the natural northeastern

boundary of the Chamala Valley Reserve Forest, where the Evil One at last revealed his identity.

The whole region abounds in bamboo and the Forest Department had apportioned it into blocks or *coupes*. When the stems grow to a certain height and thickness, that particular block or *coupe* is auctioned for cutting, and the contractor who employed the party of bamboo-cutters, as the highest bidder at the auction, had obtained the right to fell and sell the bamboos in that area. Time meant money to him and so he did not delay in shifting his employees to the site where they were to begin felling operations at once.

The very first afternoon, one of the men resting from his task had happened to look up. On top of a shelf of rock, and regarding him malevolently, he saw the head and face of a tiger. He fled.

The bamboo-cutters refused to camp in the forest that night, or any longer for that matter. They told their employer that they would rather walk back all the twelve miles to the safety or Rangampet each evening and return next morning until the *coupe* was cleared.

The contractor was not impressed. He argued that, even walking very fast, it would take them two and a half hours each way. That meant the loss of five working hours every day, which in turn implied that so many less bamboos would be cut daily. The less bamboos, the less money for him, he reminded them. They replied that, if he did not agree, they would quit in a body. Then no more bamboos would be felled and there would be no money for him at all. They stressed that their own lives meant more to them than the bamboos they cut and the money he earned. The contractor tried to compromise by saying he would agree if they consented to a proportionate reduction in the daily wages he was paying them. But the men seemed to him unreasonably determined. They demanded the same scale of wages, threatening again to quit work.

'Ah, yes,' the contractor thought to himself. 'Times are certainly bad. Labour is getting more unreasonable, more troublesome and more difficult to manage all the world over. If I don't give in, these fellows will leave and then there will be nobody to cut bamboos for me. My curses on this beastly tiger. May it die a very painful death, and that soon.'

So he agreed to their demand and that evening at dusk the whole band, including the contractor, came home to Rangampet. On the way they had to pass the gate of the Nagapatla forest lodge where Dev and I were camped. All of them trooped inside and the man who had seen the tiger told us about it. The contractor also poured out his tale of woe. We were elated. The mystery was solved at last. The Evil One was no evil spirit, intangible and unreal, as everyone had thought. It was a flesh-and-blood tiger, as I had more than half-anticipated it

would be.

The tiger chose to strike the very next day. The bamboo-cutters had returned in the morning and were working at their allotted tasks. By common consent they gave the spot, where one of them had seen the tiger the previous evening, a wide berth. The *maistry,* or foreman in charge of the coolies, announced the midday hour for them to stop work and gather beneath the grove of tamarind trees for their meal, by a series of long, sharp whistles, which he made with the aid of his tongue and teeth. One hour was allowed for this purpose and the bamboo-cutters made the most of it. After eating their curry and rice, washed down by bowlfuls of muddy water drawn from a passing stream that trickled from the pool at Umbalmeru, they sat and smoked, or chewed betel leaves, or dozed.

At the end of the hour the *maistry* gave the signal for them to return to work by a similar series of whistles, and soon the sound of the chop-chopping of bamboos, and the crash of falling stems, echoed from the glen in which they were working.

But the story of the man who had reported seeing the tiger the previous day made them nervous and kept them unusually alert. And to that fact alone did one of their number owe his life that day. For as he chopped he glanced apprehensively around him now and then. Thus he noticed the slight shaking of some fronds of tender bamboo that sprang from the ground at the base of a larger clump, and the glaring, greenish-yellow eyes that gazed at him hungrily from a background of russet brown and black and white.

The man whirled around with raised *koitha* just as the tiger leapt. The movement of its quarry told the feline that it had been discovered and the man was ready to defend himself. It checked its spring in midair by a convulsive twisting of its spinal cord and tail, landing just short of its victim whose sharp-bladed chopper swished harmlessly through the air, missing the animal by a hairsbreadth.

But the tiger had no stomach for this kind of reception. It had hoped to seize its quarry unawares. When it landed on the ground it snarled viciously, crouched for a moment as if about to attack again, and then turned tail and leapt back into the bamboos from which it had come and was immediately lost to sight.

The man raised the alarm by screaming at the top of his voice,' *Aiyo! Aiyo! Pilli! Pilli!'* (Help! Help! Tiger! Tiger!), and then made a run for the sheltering tamarind grove. His fellow workers in all directions, hearing his cries, joined in the general pandemonium and stampeded for the tamarinds. The contractor, who had just fallen asleep there, was rudely awakened by the hubbub and the men running headlong through the bamboos till they reached him.

There was no thought of work for the rest of the day. The coolies,

this time headed by the contractor himself, put their best feet forward to place as great a distance as possible between themselves and the dreaded feline that lurked in the fastnesses of Umbalmeru.

Dev and I had had an early tea and were near the third milestone on the road to Pulibonu when we met the chattering batch of men making at a jog trot for the safety of the village. They all began to jabber at once and it took at least a minute to sort things out and find the man who had been through such a harrowing experience. He described the tiger as having stood 'that high' on its four feet, indicating his chest as he did so. Truly a brute of mammoth proportions.

It was 3.45 p.m. when all this happened. I told the man to hurry, because he was to come back with Dev and myself and show us the spot where the tiger had appeared. I had a reason for wanting to do this. In plain words, I wanted to verify his story if possible, by seeing the tiger's footprints for myself. You must remember that up to that time we had only heard the most exaggerated tales about this weird beast, without the smallest shred of evidence as to its factual existence. And I know from experience to what lengths exaggeration can go when allowed to run riot in the minds of the simple jungle folk.

The man was aghast. Go back to that fearsome place? Not on your life! To hell with the very idea! He said all this and much more to me in his vernacular, and I really could not blame him for feeling that way about it. But I just had to have verification of his story. So I got tough.

I will not tell you what I said, but in a little while Dev and the bamboo-cutter and myself were walking at our best pace up the road that led to Pulibonu, and from there along the righthand branch of the letter Y to Umbalmeru.

We had nine miles to cover and we did it just before 6.30 p.m. It would soon be dark, but that did not worry us unduly as both Dev and I had brought our electric torches with us in case we might return late from our long walk. Also it would not be particularly cold at night except for Dev, who, as a whooping-cough patient, really should not expose himself to the night air and the dew-fall that went with it. I muttered a word of warning to this effect.

'Whooping-cough!' he exclaimed. 'Who said I have whooping-cough? I did have it, but that was long ago.'

The coolie pointed out the place where he had been cutting bamboos, and the fronds of young bamboo that he had noticed moving and from which the tiger had emerged. We examined the ground around and behind it. In spite of the growing dusk we clearly saw the pug-marks of a tiger. Not a very large one it is true, and whether a male or female I could not distinguish because of the fading

light and the wisps of fallen, rotting bamboo leaves on which it had trodden. But they were the footprints of a tiger all right.

From scrutinizing the ground I stood up a happy and satisfied man. The mystery was indeed solved. The Evil One that had puzzled us for so long was nothing supernatural or uncanny. It was just a tiger; but an extraordinarily shy, cunning and elusive tiger at that. Also a coward.

We had no bait; nothing to sit up over. Water was to be found in abundance in all directions. To go back to the bungalow meant walking twelve miles in darkness and exhausting our torch cells. So, why not spend the night in the jungle just for the fun of it? We might hear or see something, or we might hear or see nothing at all. At least it would be fun. Better than spending another night in the rat and snake-infested rest-house at Nagapatla.

I made the suggestion. Dev was enthusiastic. The man we had brought with us was shocked. But there was nothing he could do about it, poor fellow, unless he chose to walk back alone—which he most definitely did not.

The next question was where to sit. The pool at Umbalmeru itself would be as good a place as any. At least I hoped we could find a suitable spot there. The jungle where we were was too dense and the bamboos were too close. With nightfall we would be enveloped.

It was getting decidedly dark by the time we covered the short distance to the pool. There was no time to construct a hide on the ground, much less to build a platform or *machan* of any kind on a tree. But a banyan grew not far away, and it was quite a large old tree.

The banyan is a tree that drops roots from its branches. These in turn reach the ground, penetrate, and in due course form the trunks of other trees. So the banyan grows ever wider, covering more and more ground, and consists of many trunks, the original parent one and any number of others that have taken root subsequently. A beautiful specimen of this tree—the largest of its kind in India—grows in the Botanical Gardens at Calcutta. It covers an enormous area. It is one of the landmarks for which the Gardens there have become famous. A similarly mighty banyan grows about forty-two miles from Bangalore and two miles from a village named Thali. A stone temple originally stood at its base. The pendant roots have entirely covered the stone walls of this temple, although its entrance has been kept clear. At a casual glance the roots appear to have formed a natural cave. Incidentally a black cobra, supposed to be a hundred years old, is reputed to live in a hole at the back of the cave. He is fed with bowls of milk and half a dozen eggs at a time by the Brahmin priest who looks after the temple. The priest told me the tree is 2,000 years old.

But to return to Umbalmeru. A banyan grew not far from the

pool. Not nearly such a large and old one, but it had quite a number of root-trunks which had started growing in the ground around the main stem. Two of these grew about four feet apart; in diameter each may have been about eight feet.

We took up our position sitting on the ground between the two root-trunks. I kept my rifle and faced the jungle. Dev sat with his back to me, facing the pool, and on his lap lay my .12 bore shotgun, loaded with a lethal ball in the right barrel and an L.G. cartridge in the left. The bamboo-cutter sat on Dev's right and faced in the same direction. Dev and I each had our own torches, but whereas I had remembered to bring the clamps which held the torch to my rifle, there were no clamps for Dev and the shotgun. So the woodcutter was to hold the torch for Dev and shine it if occasion arose. Except for our two flanks, protected by the root-trunks of the banyan, we were completely exposed and visible.

In front of Dev lay the pool. Unless the tiger came along the nearer bank, he would have to cross the water, which afforded some protection. At least we could hear him. In front of me was the jungle into which I could not see once it had become dark unless I flashed my torch. All three of us would have to rely on our sense of hearing alone. The tiger, if he approached either from the side of the pool or from the jungle I faced, would immediately see us. What happened next was a matter of chance and depended on the tiger's courage. Would he attack three men together or slink away?

Dev was as elated and as excited as a schoolboy at a fair.

In no time it was pitch-dark. My feathered friends, the birds, had gone to roost long before we had taken up our positions. After a while the only audible sound was the faraway hooting of a horned owl. Somewhere high above us, in the fastnesses of the towering escarpment, maybe a mile away, he sat complacently regarding the valley that stretched below him. And as he sat he hooted: 'Whooo-oooo! Whooo-oooo!'

Suddenly a bull-frog began to croak in the pool. 'Khor! Khor! Khor! Khor! Khor!' Others joined in, one by one. It became a throbbing pulsating chorus.

'Skitch! Skitch! Skitch! Skitch!' The bamboo-cutter, whose back touched my left arm, started violently. I could imagine him staring hard into the darkness. But it was only a water-frog.

Much smaller than the bull-frog and with long, slender hindlegs, this species of frog sits half-submerged at the edge of pools and lakes. Occasionally one of them will skim across the top of the water, barely touching the surface with violent kicks of its hind legs for some yards, before coming to a halt and floating with its eyes and half its head out of the water. It was this act of skimming or leaping along the water

that had made the sound that had caused the coolie to start so violently.

I knew that so long as one such frog skimmed the surface of the water now and then, there was nothing to worry about. But if several of the frogs were to do that together, it would be a very reliable signal that something was coming and had frightened them, causing them to take shelter in the middle of the water.

The Umbalmeru pool itself is not very large. Oval in shape, it is about sixty feet by thirty feet. At the northern and narrower end it is bounded by rock, being a continuation of the terrain that lies at the foot of the escarpment. On the other three sides is jungle. We were sitting on the eastern bank. It was too dark to see now, but before settling down I had looked up and noticed the escarpment looming above us, perhaps to a height of 500 feet.

The bull-frogs croaked noisily beside the water behind me. Otherwise there was silence. Then the horned-owl began his eerie call again: 'Whooo-oooo! Whooo-oooo! Whooo-oooo!'

In the dell below us a plover suddenly started screeching: 'Did-you-do-it! Did-you-do-it! Quick! Quick! Quick! Quick!' Something had alarmed the bird. What could it have been? Almost together, I felt the backs of Deva Sundram and the coolie straighten and tauten behind mine. But I knew there was time yet. Whatever had frightened the plover, if it happened to be coming towards us, would take at least another five minutes, maybe ten, to arrive.

A small animal rustled the leaves in the jungle before me. Perhaps a mongoose, or one of those creatures that are distinctly rare in south Indian jungles—a ratel. The rustling alternated with silence as the small mammal stopped its search for food every now and then and listened for possible enemies. Then it began again to scratch the earth and scrape the leaves.

All at once it stopped and remained quiet. The five minutes were about up. Could it have sensed something approaching? Coinciding with the thought I felt the elbows of both my companions excitedly digging me in the small of my back.

Very slowly I turned my head. At first I could see nothing. And then, forming a silhouette like a shifting black blur against the faint lighter outline that was the surface of the water, something seemed to be moving towards us.

It merged into a black background of shadows cast by the outer fringes of the main banyan tree and was completely lost to sight. But it had been approaching us when this happened. The thought was a most disconcerting one. I felt certain it was the tiger, and to be helpless in the dark while a man-eater came on and attacked us at close quarters would indeed be an ignominious end.

I turned around, balancing on my right knee. Placing the stock of my rifle to my shoulder, I pointed the muzzle in the direction where I judged the killer would be and quickly pressed the button of my torch with my left thumb. The bright beam lit a ghoulish head, from which two bluish-green eyes stared back at me in surprise, fully reflecting the torch-light. But they were cowardly, sly, scheming eyes, albeit a bit foolish in their startled expression. The enormous head, out of all proportion to the sloping body of a large hyaena, looked up at us. I could clearly see the long, upright ears, the dark muzzle and the black patch under its throat, although being head-on to us, most of the grey body, with its straggling black stripes, was hidden.

I kept the torch burning. All three of us remained motionless and silent.

'Grr-rr-rr! Goo-doo! Goo-doo! Goo-doo!' growled the amazed beast, not being able to understand for a moment the origin of the light, nor its association with human agency.

Then perhaps his nose, or maybe just instinct, told him.

'Pfoof! Pfoof!' he snorted, darting to cover with his peculiar undulating gait, caused by his ridiculously short and weak hind legs trying to keep pace with his long and powerful front ones. He ran with an awkwardly loping motion, while the mane of hair along his neck and back stood erect, giving the illusion that he had suddenly grown to twice his size before our very eyes. His grey tail, bristling all over like the rest of him, fanned out behind like a feather-brush.

The hyaena vanished in the undergrowth, but he certainly did not leave the scene. He scampered around us in a wide circle, crackling the thickets as he forced his way through them, while making the most curious and disconcerting medley of sounds imaginable: 'Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!' he cackled, 'What-have-we-here? Ha! Ha!'

When he came to the windward side of us and finally got our scent, he was able to realize at last that human beings sat close by. He changed his cries to a series of disdainful remarks: 'Cheey! Shee-ay! Shee-ay!' as he scurried about hoping that we would go away. But we did not go away and he was not happy about it. In fact, he grew displeased. 'Garrar! Garrar!' he growled, then breaking into a gargling-like series of protests, 'Guddar! Guddar! Guddar! Guddar! Guddar!'

In his indignant displeasure at our persistent refusal to budge, he fairly made the jungle ring, scampering around and around and making his ridiculous noises till we were about sick of hearing him. One fact began to stick out a mile. If we did not drive this garrulous visitor away, we might as well pack our traps and walk back to the bungalow to put in a few undisturbed hours of sleep.

'Shoo! Shoo!' I said. 'Shoo! Shoo!' cried Dev. *'Chee! po phissach!*

(go devil),' repeated the coolie. But it was all to no effect; for go he certainly would not.

I groped in the earth beside me for a clod, found it and hurled it at the noisy intruder. He made more noise than ever.

'Goalee utchoodoo thaywoolee maylay!' advised the bamboo-cutter, which means. 'Shoot the so-and-so!' But he was only a poor hyaena, although he was certainly not minding his own business, and I did not want to do so. The din was shocking.

The hyaena came into view again—a dark shadow against the lighter sheen of the pool of water reflecting the starlight.

Just then the tiger growled on the other side of the water: 'Aa-ooo-om! Aa-ooo-om!'

The effect on the hyaena was instantaneous. He stopped dead in his tracks, as if turned into stone. His long ears were clearly outlined as he turned his head away to look for the dreaded author of that ominous sound. The next instant he was gone!

We heard a scrambling patter for a few seconds as he dashed over the fallen leaves. Then came silence: intense and frightening.

We knew the tiger had been somewhere in front of us and across the water when he had growled. But was he still there? He might be, but just as likely he might now be behind us or on either side. For tigers do not advertise their movements as the hyaena had done. Or he might have gone away.

The hyaena had warned him and he knew that all was not well. The question was: would he want to investigate? Or would he slink off, just as the hyaena had done? The next few moments would give us the answer, and it was very important to us. So we kept silent and remained watchful.

The minutes dragged by and an hour had passed. Except for the distant chirping of wood-crickets and the closer croaking of the frogs, there was no other sound to be heard. I began to wish the hyaena was back. The noise he had made, although ridiculous, had been something tangible and concrete. But this silence was disconcerting and unnerving! We grew fidgety.

Midnight came and passed, and then it became chill. We heard slight rustlings and faint scampering sounds on the dried leaves and in the undergrowth. Rats perhaps, or other small animals, feeding and quenching their thirst at the water.

A shadow glided overhead. We heard the heavy flapping of wings. Then came silence again.

'Whooo-oooo! Whooo-oooo!' The horned owl was now our companion. No doubt he knew the time when the small creatures would come for water and thus expose themselves for a few seconds. We never knew when he attacked; but we certainly heard the result.

A rabbit (called a 'hare' in India) was the victim. We heard his plaintive scream for mercy as the cruel talons of the owl drove into his tender back, and we heard the faint 'thud, thud', as the powerful beak struck his skull. Then the hare shrieked no more. For he was dead.

The hours dragged by and it grew more chilly. We could not see the sky immediately overhead because of the canopy of branches formed by the banyan; but through the clearing over the water hole, across which the giant owl had lately flapped his way, we caught glimpses of it. There were no clouds, and one or two stars twinkled distantly.

The clear sky assisted the earth in radiating what little heat had remained since the hours of sunlight. Rapidly it became colder and colder. This caused a heavy dew-fall and we could hear the moisture dripping from the leaves of the trees around us, although we were protected by the two trunks of the banyan and its branches above our heads.

The coolie, poor fellow, was the thinnest clad and he began to react to the cold in real earnest. I could feel him shivering against my back and hear the faint chattering of his teeth. The barrel of the rifle in my hands was like ice and the dew ran down it in a little trickle. I pointed the muzzle downwards to keep the moisture from running inside.

To a certain extent the cold discouraged the mosquitoes which had been very active since sunset. Even the faint scratching sounds made by the rats and other small animals subsided. No doubt they were feeling the cold too. The chorus of the bullfrogs died away to a spasmodic individual effort by one or other of their number. It was that hour, early in the morning, when even the denizens of the night appear to rest.

After 3 a.m. the wind began to blow. The warm air in the valley below us, which had cooled by now, had long risen from the ground to be replaced by the cold air from the lofty escarpment to the north and northeast. It soughed and moaned and bent the tops of the lesser trees as it blew into the valley in short violent gusts.

I began to forget about the tiger and felt sleepy. But it was too cold even to doze. The distant crow of a single jungle-cock indicated the time as past 4 a.m. Our vigil was drawing to a close and the tiger had not come.

The false dawn came at about five o'clock, with its hopes of an early sunrise. Then, as usual, followed a few minutes of renewed, intensified darkness. The faint outline of the summit of the escarpment to the east showed that the night hours were coming to an end at last. The valley below was still enveloped in darkness as the crags above began to show up in the most delicate hues of pale pink, curiously

mixed with a mauve and blue background, before which wisps of mist spiralled upwards from the trees growing on the slopes like the smoke-signals of a band of marauding Red Indians.

'Whoomp! Whoomp! Whoomp!' The rousing cry reverberated across the ragged perpendicular face of the escarpment and boomed with a hollow echo in the wooded valley below. It was the joyous call of the male langur, the large grey monkey with the whiskered black face and abnormally long, curved tail, that lives in the forests of south India, as he awoke to greet the coming day. Soon other langurs joined in and call after call echoed from crag to cliff and then re-echoed across the forested valley to fade away in the distance.

It was quite bright where we were sitting, although the sun had not topped the serrated line of rocks and boulders that marked the summit of the escarpment to the east, when at last we rose to our feet, stamped and stretched and yawned to dispel the effects of a sleepless, uncomfortable night, and began the twelve-mile march to the bungalow at Nagapatla. None of us was in a good mood, nor did we feel like talking.

At the bungalow gates we met some of our friends, the bamboo-cutters, who had come there from the village to await our return. 'What happened?' asked someone. 'Did the tiger come?' queried another. 'Did it attack you?' asked a third.

'Damn the tiger,' I replied crossly. Then, relenting, I told our coolie to acquaint his colleagues with the details of all that had happened. They were discussing it loudly as I placed the kettle on the primus stove to make hot water for tea. And they were still discussing it when Dev and I tumbled onto the hard beds and fell asleep at once.

We slept through the afternoon and awoke about 4 p.m. to eat a late lunch, washed down with more tea. Then we put our heads together to think out some way of settling accounts with the tiger.

Marshalling the facts, or rather as many of them as were known to us, we found we were up against an animal that did not follow the normal habits of a man-eater in the least. Firstly, all its human kills had been made in the afternoon, during the heat of the day. Secondly, they were all more or less localized and within a few miles of the Umbalmeru pool and escarpment where he appeared to be living. Ordinarily, man-eaters cover a large area and follow a more or less distinct beat, which sometimes extends for more than a hundred miles. Thirdly, those of his victims whom he took he made away with completely and mysteriously. Not a single body had been recovered. Fourthly, he appeared an abnormally shy animal, with more than the usual degree of cowardice that all man-eaters evince towards the human being who fights back. In this case the bamboo-cutter had frightened it off with his *koitha,* while the hyaena's warnings of the

previous night had caused it to slink away when it could easily have attacked us. Fifthly, it did not seem to have the habit of wandering about its jungle domain as tigers usually do. We had not found this animal's tracks along any of the jungle-paths or stream-beds which we had searched for that very purpose. Sixthly, we had not received any reports of cattle being killed in the surrounding area.

We could make nothing of it, so we decided to do the only possible thing—tie up a live bait or two in the vicinity of the Umbalmeru water hole, although we scarcely expected they would be taken.

With this in view we went down to Rangampet village after dinner that night. The villagers co-operated readily, and Dev and I each bought a three-quarters-grown bull for the sum (in those days) of about forty rupees. In English currency this ran to about three pounds apiece! One of them was brown in colour, the other ash-grey. We deliberately avoided animals that were white, or even black, as some tigers shun baits of either colour, but especially white. We wanted to take no chances. Having completed the deal, we led our animals back to the forest lodge and quartered them for the night in the motor-shed, pushing the Model T into the open.

Early the following morning we got busy and with the help of two of the bamboo-cutters led our animals all the way back to Umbalmeru. We tied one under the banyan at the side of the water hole, and the other about two miles away, near the track leading back to Pulibonu. Here also we tied it close to a selected tree. We did this deliberately so that in the event of either animal being killed, a suitable tree would be readily available in which we could sit and await the tiger's return.

All this took us till past midday, so that it was evening by the time we returned to the rest house at Nagapatla.

The following morning we used the Ford to cover the first seven miles of rough track to Pulibonu. The car could go no further for the simple reason that the road ended there. So we visited our baits on foot. They were both alive.

Untying each in turn, we led them to water, and then retied them, leaving both with enough to eat until the next day. There was nothing more we could do after that. Dev said he would like to visit some of the temples at the town of Tirupati, which was about fifteen miles from the bungalow. So we did that.

Tirupati is a centre of Hindu pilgrimage, devotees coming there in their thousands throughout the year to pay homage to the god Govinda, whose name they keep chanting aloud. All the women who visit these shrines are required to shave their heads entirely as an outward token of having made the pilgrimage. Considering they arrive

in hundreds daily, the quantity of hair removed must be colossal.

Just before returning we dropped in at the refreshment room on the railway station for tea. No train being due for some time, the manager was at a loose end for the moment. So he came over to the table where we were sitting and opened a conversation to pass the time. In the usual easygoing manner of India he began asking who we were, where we had come from, why we had come, and numerous other questions.

Dev good-naturedly gave him all the details. The manager, who professed to know a great deal about *shikar,* also agreed that the tiger's general conduct was most unusual and not in keeping with a man-eater's normal behaviour.

Then he said something that made me sit up with a jerk. 'I wonder if it could be the tigress that escaped some months ago from a circus that came to town.'

Now it was my turn to ask the questions, and I fairly rained them on him. What circus? How long ago? At which place had the tigress escaped? Had a report been made? Had she been recaptured?

He answered my questions piecemeal, and from the information he gave we gleaned the following facts. A small travelling circus with a tigress and a few other animals had visited Tirupati and had camped a mile or so outside town. The proprietor of the circus had come to make friends with the manager of the refreshment room at the railway station because they were not teetotallers, and in a district where prohibition prevails people who are not teetotallers find much in common in their search for that of which they both feel in need.

One evening, after a few glasses had been surreptitiously consumed, the proprietor of the circus had loosened up a bit and had confided to the manager of the refreshment room that two nights before the tigress had escaped. The stupid fellow who looked after her had not closed the door of her cage properly. The proprietor had been afraid to inform the police, and as he was a likeable fellow, held in esteem among his own artists and employees, he was confident that they would not divulge the secret. Nobody had. A half-hearted attempt had been made to find the missing tigress, but no one appeared to have seen her. As the jungle lies within a mile of Tirupati, the proprietor naturally concluded that his tigress had found her way back into the forest where she would be able to look after herself. He became reconciled to his loss and the circus moved on.

I asked the manager if he had ever seen this animal before her escape. He replied that he had, as the circus owner had given him a free pass to visit the show as often as he pleased. She was not a very big tigress, but she was full-grown. He added that he thought she was unusually fierce, having often seen her snarling and growling as she

ate her usual single meal of beef each day. He also felt she had never been thoroughly broken in, as he never saw her put through the usual acts of circus tigers.

A curious thought entered my mind and I asked him: About what time did this tigress receive her daily meal?'

He glanced at me rather in surprise, but answered promptly enough: 'In the afternoon, after the circus-people had finished their own lunch.'

The enigma was solved, and the animal's peculiar habits were no longer a mystery. For I was sure now that the man-eater was the escaped tigress and no other beast.

She maintained her habit of eating at midday. She was terrified of people—unless she could spring upon them unawares and kill them quickly. She could not hunt properly and hence had not developed a specific line of beat like a normal man-eating tiger. Being fundamentally still afraid of people, she made off with her human kills as quickly as she could, leaving no traces behind, in order to devour her victim very far from the scene of the crime. And, still not completely rid of her habits after living so long in a cage, she had found some shelter for herself, probably a cave, and had made it a permanent abode, instead of wandering from one area of forest to another, after the manner of normal tigers, whether man-eaters or not.

The more I thought about it, the more certain I felt that my theory was correct. And her abode was doubtless somewhere in the vicinity of Umbalmeru; probably a cave or rocky hollow of some kind at the base of the escarpment. After all, as the crow flies, the distance from Tirupati to the escarpment near Umbalmeru could not be more than twenty miles, if as much. And that is no great distance for a tiger to cover.

I did not confide my ideas to Dev just then, but kept plying the manager of the refreshment room with more questions. But it was soon evident that he had told us all he knew. The only additional information he could give was that the circus had shifted from Tirupati to Renigunta, and from there to a place called Puttur, and then to Arkonam, a railway junction about forty miles from the city of Madras. He had kept up a desultory correspondence with the proprietor and had received letters from all these places. Then the letters had stopped, so that now he had no idea where the circus had gone.

One last thing he told me, and that was that he remembered the tigress had been called Rani.

When eventually we left Tirupati after dark that evening to return to the forest bungalow at Nagapatla, I felt our visit had been most opportune.

Before dawn next morning we drove to Pulibonu, left the car and visited our baits again. Both were alive and well. After that we scoured several *nullahs* and pathways, looking for fresh tiger-pugs and hoping to encounter our quarry. All without result. It was evening when we got back to the bungalow. We had dinner and then went to Rangampet to enlist the aid of a man named Ramiah, who had served me on hunting trips in the Chamala Valley years before. I hoped he would be able to help me now.

Ramiah is a rather extraordinary fellow, at least so far as villagers go. The first time I met him, which might have been eight to ten years previously, he had attracted my attention by his quite unusual interest in matters no other villager would have bothered to know. Ramiah claimed to have discovered a secret herb growing in the valley, the leaves of which, if eaten, would counteract the effects of the bite of any poisonous snake. He said he kept a stock of these leaves, dried and powdered, with him in his hut, and by means of them had saved the lives of many people who had been bitten by cobras and Russell's vipers, and also of cattle that had been bitten. At my request he had brought me a small plant which I had taken back with me to Bangalore and attempted to grow in my garden. Unfortunately, it died. Ramiah had also discovered another herb, a couple of leaves of which, if dropped into a teapot while the tea was being made vastly enhanced its flavour. I had tried this herb and discovered his claim to be true. He had presented me with a smooth egg-shaped stone the size of a tennis ball which he said would always exude a trace of moisture, particularly in the mornings. I had also taken this stone back with me to Bangalore and found that what he said was true. The strange phenomenon had surprised and interested me enough to show the stone to a geologist at Bangalore. But that gentleman, as amazed as I was, had offered no explanation for the strange occurrence.

On one occasion, at the end of a hunting trip, I had offered to pay Ramiah for his services. Instead, he asked me to buy a piece of land at the head of the valley where the forest began, which was for sale cheaply, and allow him to cultivate it, and in return he would serve me any time I wanted when I came to Nagapatla on a shooting trip.

I had done what he asked and bought the land, which was about two and three-quarter acres in extent, for fifty rupees (less than four pounds in English currency). Thereafter, Ramiah had cultivated the land rent free for himself, and had willingly come to my assistance whenever I had called upon him.

So we got Ramiah out of his hut that night and, sitting on his doorstep, I related what I had heard from the refreshment room

manager. I had already consulted Ramiah when we had first heard about this killer, but as he had been one of the many who had subscribed to the 'evil spirit' theory, I had not thought it worthwhile to enlist his aid until now.

After relating the story of the escaped tigress, I said: 'I am sure that if any man knows every nook and corner of the Chamala Valley jungle, that man is you. Now think very very carefully. Is there a cave at the foot of the escarpment in the vicinity of the Umbalmeru pool, or within the radius of two or three miles from it?'

His answer came immediately. 'Why certainly, *sahib.* There are—now, let me see—one, two, three, four, and yes, one more, five caves, within about the distance you have said. Two of them are, roughly speaking, to the north, and the remaining three to the east. One of the two to the north is rather high up on the face of the escarpment. I don't think a tiger would readily use it. The ascent is too steep. I know the langur monkeys play around that cave, but they don't live in it either. All the other four would be quite suitable for a tiger to lie up in.'

I was elated and showed my joy. 'Good man, Ramiah,' I exclaimed. 'Will you lead me to each of them?'

'Surely, *Sahib,'* he assented readily. 'I have promised to accompany you anywhere you want in this jungle, and at any time, in return for allowing me to cultivate your land, free of rent, these many years. That promise I will keep, *Sahib,'* he concluded simply.

I questioned him further about these caves and gathered that three of the four he had in mind were rather small. The fourth, which was one of the three caves at the foot of the escarpment to the east was considerably larger than the others and had a name of its own: 'Madapenta', because it was close to a small pool formed by a rill that trickled down the escarpment. *Penta* signifies a pool.

'We will be able to visit all four of these caves in one day, will we not?' I asked him.

'Surely, *Sahib,'* he assented. 'The cave to the north is hardly a mile from Umbalmeru. The three to the east are from two to three miles from the water hole, but within a mile of each other.'

'I will come for you in the car tomorrow morning at cockcrow,' I told him. 'Be ready. With an early start we should be at Pulibonu by daybreak. We will walk the remaining distance to Umbalmeru, and from thence to the caves, beginning with the one to the north.'

'As you say, *Sahib,'* he acquiesced immediately. ' I will be waiting for you.'

Dev and I went back to the forest bungalow as happy as two children. There Dev spent till midnight cleaning and re-cleaning the .12 shotgun. He even cleaned my rifle.

The grey-hackled junglecocks were crowing when the Model T chugged out of the gate of the Nagapatla rest house next morning, and their cousins, the village roosters of Rangampet, had begun to answer them when we arrived at Ramiah's hut. It was almost 5 a.m. He had heard the Ford approaching and stepped out of the doorway as I stopped the car.

We drove the seven miles to Pulibonu, and it was 6.5 a.m. when we halted near the well and set out on our walk along the footpath that formed the right-hand stroke of the letter Y and which ran, very roughly, in a northeasterly direction to end at the water hole at Umbalmeru. We arrived at the pool a few minutes before eight, and the sun was shining brightly in a cloudless sky.

Ramiah told me that from Umbalmeru no well-defined footpath led to any of the four caves we were about to search. We would have to rely on his sense of direction alone.

And Ramiah's sense of direction never failed him. He led the way, armed with his *koitha,* which is a long knife curved at the end, fitted to a bamboo handle about a foot long. It resembled a question mark without the dot at the bottom; but it proved extremely useful when, at times, he employed it to hack a path through the undergrowth.

Very often we met game trails leading in all directions, made chiefly, as I could see from the tracks themselves, by sambar and wild pig, with an occasional trail left by sloth bears, which had dug for roots here and there, and had systematically demolished every ant hill in their eager search for termites. But such things did not deter our guide nor cause him to lose his sense of direction for a moment. Onwards he moved to the north with me just behind him, holding the .405 ready against a surprise attack. Dev brought up the rear with the shotgun.

The land began to rise steadily towards the base of the escarpment which we could see between the trees, frowning down upon us. Soon the larger trees gave place to more bushy undergrowth and boulders lay scattered about, increasing in size and number as we rose ever higher. I had little doubt these had, from time to time, been washed down from the escarpment by rain and the consequent landslides.

Ramiah stopped half an hour later and said in a whisper that we were approaching the first of the caves. We redoubled— if that was possible—the caution we had been exercising since leaving the pool at Umbalmeru. The man-eater might be lurking anywhere, without our knowing anything about it.

Then Ramiah stopped a second time, indicating with a nod of his head, but no spoken word, where the first of the caves lay. And I saw

it—the cave, I mean. A pile of boulders had fallen, one upon another, and in doing so had formed a cave. I could see the opening now. Not a large one by any means, perhaps a yard in diameter at the entrance, but big enough to shelter a tiger very easily.

Stretching out my left hand, I touched Ramiah's shoulder. Then I drew him back and took the lead, placing him between myself and Deva Sundram, still at the rear. On tiptoe, and as silently as possible, taking care not to tread on a dried piece of wood or leaf that might crackle, I inched forward till I stood about fifteen feet from the mouth of the cave. Unfortunately the ground before it was hard and stony. Besides, straggling clumps of spear-grass grew everywhere. No tracks would be visible on such terrain.

I made signs to Ramiah and Dev to pick up stones and throw them into the cave. They understood my signals and in a few seconds a desultory bombardment began as they hurled stones, big and small, into the narrow entrance.

Nothing happened. I could hear the thud as each stone fell, and the clatter as it bounced and rolled inside. Certainly, if a tiger was hiding there, it would either charge out upon us or at least demonstrate in no uncertain manner, by growling. But nothing whatever happened. There was complete silence, except for the thud and clatter of the stones. It began to look as if the tiger was not at home.

More stones followed, but without response of any kind. After ten minutes I was sure the cave was uninhabited. I moved right up to the mouth, where the grass and rubble ended and plain earth formed the flooring of the recess. Still keeping a sharp lookout on the dark interior, I stooped down and glanced at the ground for tracks. There were no pug-marks anywhere. The only animal that inhabited the cave, as I could see from his small footprints, was a porcupine; and I knew that no amount of stone-throwing would ever induce him to come out and face the bright sunlight. Being a creature of the night, a porcupine can only be smoked out of his burrow, and that with considerable difficulty. Generally, he will prefer to suffocate under such conditions, if he cannot manage to burrow still deeper.

Just before we turned away, Ramiah pointed upwards to the escarpment. He directed our attention to the second of the two caves he had said lay to the north of the water hole. We could just see the entrance, hidden as it was by the rank grass that half-concealed it from sight. The cave looked to be at least 200 or more feet above us and was perhaps two furlongs away.

Ramiah had been right. No tiger would attempt that steep climb. Besides, there was another piece of conclusive evidence that no feline lived in that second cave. A langur monkey sat complacently at the

entrance staring down at us inquisitively. If a tiger had passed anywhere nearby, certainly if one was living in the cave, the langur would not be there. They are far too cute to take chances.

We made our way down the slope to Umbalmeru and then set out for the three caves that lay at the foot of the eastern escarpment. Once again Ramiah showed himself a good judge of distances. The first cave took us nearly forty-five minutes to reach, by which fact I judged it to be a little over two miles from the water hole. The sloping ground and terrain were much the same, but the cave appeared to be a chasm rather than a regular cave, in that it was open at the top and had been formed by a big slice of the rock face that had fallen in a landslide and lay about ten feet from the base of the cliff. The piece that had fallen looked to be some twenty feet or more in height, and the space of ten feet between it and the escarpment was what Ramiah had called a cave. Being open at the top to admit rain and sunlight, it was thickly overgrown with lantana and long grass.

Although a wonderful place in which to hide temporarily, it did not seem a very likely spot for a tiger to choose to live in for any length of time. For one thing, it was too choked with undergrowth. A tiger does not like to make a home in which he himself might be taken by surprise.

I told my companions to follow the same plan of hurling stones into the recess while I stood guard over them with my rifle. As expected, nothing happened. After a while we drew closer. The ground was too stony and hard to reveal tracks, but the intense bombardment of stones that Dev and Ramiah rained into the gap soon made it clear that the tiger was not there.

We skirted the escarpment southward to the next cave, which we reached in about fifteen minutes. It seemed to form the exit of some sort of subterranean passage which led into the escarpment. The opening was comparatively small, at most two feet across. The usual stoning followed and we achieved a negative result for the third time. Once again the ground was too dry and hard for tracks, so we approached the mouth of the passage and set fire to the grass that grew around.

Even if our stoning produced no results, the sight of fire and smell of smoke would bring the tiger out at the double. Still nothing happened. We spent the next ten minutes or so carefully extinguishing every trace of the fire we had made. We knew too well that a single glowing ember would be quite sufficient to start a forest fire that might blaze for days and destroy thousands of acres of timber.

To say we were disappointed would be putting it mildly. We were thoroughly crestfallen. But one cave remained to be visited, the largest of the lot, the one Ramiah had called Madapenta. He told us it

was over a mile away.

With little hope of success we set out for this place. Just before we reached it we came to the little jungle pool that gave the cave its name. And here our hopes soared skyward. Clearly imprinted in the mire at the edge of the pool were several sets of pugs, and they had been made by a tigress. Obviously this was her main source of water.

It took another 200 yards, at least, of careful noiseless progress before the cave itself came into view. It had a large entrance, more than five feet in width and perhaps a little over that in height. Lastly, it was clear of grass and undergrowth and provided an excellent view of the approach of an enemy to a lurking tigress within. How excellent this was became clear within the next few seconds. Before Dev or Ramiah could throw the first stone, there came a thunderous growl from the darkness within, and the very next moment out leapt the tigress.

The bright sunlight blinded her for a while. Then her eyes adjusted themselves and she spotted us. She hesitated a brief second, then cowardice, which appeared to be quite strong in this animal's make-up, overcame her. She swerved to her right to make off.

At that instant I acted on the spur of the moment. Loudly and sharply, I called: 'Rani! Rani!'

The tigress halted. She turned to face me. There was ferocity in her countenance; but also a strange expression of bewilderment, recognition and partial submission. But our presence was a riddle to which she never found the answer, for, taking no chances, I fired into her chest, following up, as she toppled forward, with a bullet in her brain.

She was a young animal, hardly full-grown, and obviously thin and underfed. What had turned Rani into a man-eater?

The answer was plain. Years of captivity had rendered her useless at the art of stalking and killing wild game. On the other hand she was conversant only with the appearance and habits of mankind, although she never to the very end lost her instinctive fear of them.

So, in these circumstances she did the only possible thing to keep herself alive. She killed her human victims by surprise attack, and then took the bodies far away, where she would be safe from the danger of pursuit while she fed.

Before closing this story may I add a word of caution that, of course, will only apply to people living in places such as India, Africa and other countries where wild animals can be caught young and kept as pets. I know a lady who brought up a panther cub until it grew too big and too dangerous to be kept any longer. She was passionately attached to the animal, which was equally fond of her. She would not hear of presenting it to a zoo or a circus, as she was convinced that it

would be ill-treated at both places. Shooting it, naturally, was for her out of the question. So she took it by car to a certain large jungle and there set it free. Incidentally, she told me later with tears in her eyes, that as the car drove away the panther bounded along behind in an attempt to get back to her.

I wonder if this well-meaning but sadly misguided lady quite realized what she was doing. She had just liberated a very dangerous animal which she had brought up from a cub upon boiled meat, rice, bread, pudding, porridge and what not, omitting to mention such delicacies as sweets, ice-cream and things of that sort. This unfortunate creature was totally unfit to look after itself and catch and kill its legitimate prey. There were just three things that could happen to it, and all of them most unpleasant to contemplate. It might approach the first human being it met in a friendly spirit and be killed for its pains. Secondly, it might starve to death, although this is very unlikely, for when driven by hunger the instinct for self-preservation would become so strong that the panther would eventually kill something. Thirdly, and worst of all, the animal might become a man-eater.

She told me what she had done less than a week after she had liberated her pet. I advised her to scan the newspapers closely for the following month or so. I did the same.

Within a few days we both read a short announcement that told of the strange behaviour of a very emaciated panther that had wandered into a village (which was within a few miles of the place where she had liberated her pet) and gone to sleep inside a grass hut. Then came the sad part. The villagers had closed the door of the hut, poured kerosene oil over the thatch and set fire to it, burning the poor beast to death.

The lady was heartbroken at her pet's horrible end. But I wonder what she would have felt had she read instead that it had become a killer of men, forced to the pernicious habit by her foolishness in setting it free when it was totally unable to fend for itself.

Three

A Night by the Camp Fire

My wife says i am eccentric. my friends say so too. and i suppose they are all quite right. But what if I am? I like being eccentric at times.

One of my habits, even to this day, when I get disgusted with the sight of too many people and the awful noise they make, is to jump into my car and drive away to some nearby jungle. There I will leave the car, wander off into the forest, make myself a nice large camp fire as night approaches, and spend the hours of darkness just seated by the blaze. I throw fresh wood on the fire as occasion demands, having already gathered it before darkness fell. Eventually the supply of wood will give out, or I might feel sleepy. In either case there is only one thing to do. That is to go to sleep beside the fire. The embers will keep me warm when the chill and dewfall of early morning might otherwise prove uncomfortable. They will also protect me from elephants and snakes, the only creatures to be feared when no man-eaters are around. With daybreak I will go back to the car and come home and wonder why I did such a foolish and eccentric thing, and what I got out of it.

But I have done it, and will do it, again and again.

Other forms of this madness are to go out to the jungle on moonlit nights, and also on dark nights, and sit behind some tree, or on a rock, or beside a water hole, and just watch and listen.

Those who have had the good luck at any time to sit beside a camp fire, out in the wide open spaces, even where there was no danger from lurking animals or poisonous snakes, might be able to understand my fondness for this pastime. There is a pleasure that comes to one at such times that words cannot describe. It touches some hidden inner chord and sets one's soul afire!

Perhaps it is on such occasions, and in such solitudes, that a man's inner self comes into closest touch with the infinite. I feel very near indeed then to God, far closer than I can feel in any church where the padre, either on the basis of a monthly salary or other means of remuneration, automatically repeats words for the uplift of my erring and sinful self.

However, let me not talk about myself. Perhaps you would like to come with me on one of these night prowls—'camp fire trips' you may call them—into the jungle.

The Studebaker is ready with six gallons of petrol in her tank. She also has a six-cylinder engine and is rated to have horse-power,

although how many of those horses are alive after these many strenuous years, I wonder, nor try to guess. Just bring some sandwiches, a water-bottle and if you can get it, a thermos flask of hot tea. I will like you all the better. Your great coat and a cap, too, in case you feel cold, and a pipe, tobacco and matches if you are a smoker. That is all that is necessary. It is 3 p.m., but we have only about fifty miles to cover.

I am taking you to a place called Kundukottai, where there is a nice forest. Two ranges of hills converge there; and two streams, coming from different directions, join together to form one large stream. In the vernacular, the big stream is called Doddahalla (big hollow or big ravine), but I have called it the Secret River. The jungle around this area holds a few animals of every species, except bison. I am told bison were once there also, but they have been shot out long ago, although the forest range officer says they were wiped out by foot-and-mouth disease contracted from the village cattle that graze in the forest. After all, how can the poor man admit the real fact? He is, after all, the range officer.

We are away, and for the first twenty-five miles of our route we spin along a metalled road. At the nineteenth mile from Bangalore it leaves the state of Mysore behind and enters the state of Madras. Exactly at the twenty-fifth milestone we come to the small town of Hosur, which is also the taluk headquarters of that area. From Hosur we branch off the main road and for the next sixteen miles travel along what is known in India as a *kutcha* road—that is, a road made with sand and stones where, for some reason or the other, these two components never seem to be in the proper proportion to make it a good road. One or the other predominates in turn. The stones cut the car's tyres, while the sandy stretches make heavy going. In the rainy season these sandy sections become very entertaining for the motorist with a sense of humour, if there is such a man, for then he will slide and skid from side to side, or perhaps get bogged down to the axle if he is not careful. But this is not the rainy season and we cover those sixteen miles in fair time, to reach the smaller town of Denkanikota, which is the headquarters of two forest range officers controlling different blocks of jungle.

Now we leave the stone-and-sand road and travel on a road that is not a road at all, for this is nothing but a glorified bullock-cart track. About three and a half miles from Denkanikota this track crosses the upper reaches of one of the two streams I have mentioned. There are no complicated and expensive bridges here; the track just splashes through the stream. This is fair enough, unless there has been heavy rain. Then the stream becomes a torrent and the water may rise to a depth of ten feet. When that happens you just go back to

Denkanikota and try again after two days, when the water-level may have subsided. Just think how lucky you were to have been on the Denkanikota side. Supposing you had been on the other bank; you would have had to remain there till the flood went down.

Twice more we cross the stream that snakes alongside the track. At the eighth milestone we pass the hamlet of Kundukottai, overshadowed by a rocky hill noted for two things—panthers and the large rock-bee.[1] And remember that of these the bees are far more dangerous when really roused.

The track now drops sharply into a valley while curving around the spurs of the rocky hill. But we have only a mile more to go, and there, beside the ninth milestone, we must leave the Studebaker after first backing it and turning it around for the return journey—rather an awkward manoeuvre since the track is scarcely wider than the length of the car, with a steep decline on one side.

It is done at last. We place four stones behind the four wheels besides leaving the car in gear, just in case some fidgety wayfarer tampers with the controls. Also we must disconnect one of the leads to the battery, since the wayfarer may switch on the lights for you and allow them to burn. Carrying the few things we have brought with us, we must walk sharply downhill to the Doddahalla stream, the two halves of which have united less than a mile higher up, to form the one watercourse which I have named the Secret River.

Indeed, it has secrets of geological interest further down its course. But you will not tempt me to divulge them, for if I did, this beautiful stretch of forest and stream would be invaded and commercialized to their utter destruction.

At last we reach the bed of the little river and find it a veritable fairyland. There is not much water in it at this season; just a tiny trickle that meanders sometimes down the centre of the sandy bed, and at other times curves from bank to bank. Both sides are thickly wooded with towering, gnarled trees—tamarind, *jumlum* , and *muthee* mostly, with here and there a stray flame-of-the-forest, ficus tree, banyan, *neem* and *mhowa.* Between the trees the tall, feathery stems of bamboos bend gracefully over the sandy stretches. Sudden currents of cool breeze now and then rush down the valley and blow along the streambed. When that happens, the branches of the trees and the lofty tufts of the bamboos swing and sway in unison to make a distant soughing sound like a faraway waterfall, or the thunder of the sea on distant reefs in a restless ocean.

It is just 5 p.m., but we have a deal of work to do before it gets dark. First we select a camp site: a spot fairly high up on the sandy bank. And now comes the all-important task of gathering wood for our camp fire. Bear in mind that the more wood we gather the longer the

blaze will last, and also the stronger and brighter it will be. There is no difficulty whatever in getting the wood, for it lies everywhere in abundance, thrown up on both banks and even on the wide streambed itself, wedged tightly between boulders and tree trunks that blocked the way when the river was in spate after the rains and carried everything before it—tree-trunks, logs, branches, roots—everything and anything.

It is 6.15 p.m. and we are ready. It is also growing dark. But let us not light the fire just yet, for that will alarm the birds. Rather, let us listen to them awhile: the challenging calls of the grey junglecocks, the wrangling of spurfowl, the strident, plaintive 'meowing' of peafowl, the restless cries of the ever-watchful plover or 'Did-you-do-it', and the distant, provoking crescendo of the 'brain-fever' bird.

Now it is almost dark and the nightjars flit around. One sits on a boulder and is lost to sight in the matchless camouflage that blends with the stone. But we know it is there for we hear it, 'Chuck! Chuck! Chuck! Chuck! Chuck-oooo!' it trills.

Suddenly a distant medley of sound falls on our ears. Not discordant, but strangely thrilling; maybe eerie.

'Ooooo-oooo-ooooh! Woooo-woooo-wooooh!'

'Oo-where? Oo-where? Oo-where? Where? Where?'

'Here! Here! Here! Heere! Heere! Heeeere!'

'Hee-yah! Hee-yah! Heeee-yah!'

'Yah! Yah! Ya-ah! Ya-ah! Heeeeee-yah! Heeeeee-yah!'

It is the chorus of a jackal-pack in their restless hunt for food. The leader calls stridently, raucously—'Oo-where? Oo-where? Oo-where?'—and the pack seem to answer: 'Here! Here! Heere! Heee-yah! Yah! Yah! Yah!'

The long-drawn ululation bursts forth again and is answered by the staccato, raucous, vociferous refrain. The savage call and plaintive reply echo and re-echo from the forbidding darkness of the surrounding forest, rise and fall in crescendo and diminuendo down the aisles of the jungle. The shrieking crescendo of noise passes frantically into a prolonged and indescribable clamour. It permeates the clinging, enveloping, enshrouding blackness. Nothing can restrain it. That wildly beautiful and infinitely savage chorus lingers, dies away and screams again to a crescendo, snivels, abates and swells in turn; an unending medley of outrageous sounds.

Night has fallen. It is time to light the fire, not because of the jackals, for in spite of the forbidding calls they are harmless; not because of a wandering tiger or panther, because there are no man-eaters in this area at present, nor will they hurt you. The reason for the fire is the existence of two different sorts of creatures, one of them very big and the other quite small, which will harm you in no

uncertain manner if either happens to come too close: a wandering solitary elephant, and a creeping poisonous snake. We have brought no firearms, and it will not be a pleasant experience in the darkness should an elephant come upon us or a venomous snake find us obstructing his path.

The fire is soon crackling merrily. A few sparks fly heavenward and the glow fitfully lights up the boles of the trees surrounding us, silent sentinels of the watchful wild. The jackals see the glow, or maybe smell the smoke. Their yowling comes to an abrupt end. The fire has frightened everything into silence, except for the wood-crickets which chirp ceaselessly from their shelters among the fallen leaves.

The larger animals will not start moving till after eight o'clock at the earliest, so we have about an hour for a chat. There is no place quite so suitable for a friendly talk as a camp fire. The red embers, the crackle of flames, the occasional shower of sparks as a fresh piece of wood is thrown into the blaze, the acrid smell of smoke that curls upwards in a spiral to the sky above—all these help to give one the feeling of being at home with oneself, with Nature and with God.

Perhaps you would like me to tell you something about the more intimate and individual natures of some of the denizens of these forests. So far I have told you stories of hunting and shooting them which will give the impression that these animals are without qualification fierce, implacable and unreasonable, given only to the lust of killing and destroying. I thought so, too, in my younger days. But since that far-off time I have kept most of these creatures as pets, admittedly from an early age, but to quite an advanced age in various ways and capacities; every one of them has exhibited traits of remarkable good sense and affection, if only the owner can get to understand their little peculiarities and shortcomings.

Let me try to illustrate my point by telling you about a few of them.

I will begin with Bruno, my wife's pet sloth bear. I got him for her by accident.

I was with a party of friends who had gone to hunt wild boar for meat. There is a place about thirty miles beyond Mysore city where the sugarcane fields are infested by wild-pig, which cause much damage to the crops. The pigs lie up in the sugarcane plantations during the day and we had them driven out by 'beaters' (who are the willing owners of the fields and their hirelings), shooting them as they broke cover between adjoining fields or tried to escape into the surrounding scrub jungle. The arrangement is that half the meat goes to the beaters while we take the rest.

Nearly two years ago, on one such beat, out rushed a sounder of

pigs and some of them were shot, while the rest escaped. Everybody thought the fun was over when suddenly there came a loud 'Woof! Woof!' and a solitary sloth bear followed, looking decidedly black and decidedly hot in the midday sun.

Now I will not shoot a sloth bear wantonly but, unfortunately for the poor beast, one of my companions did not feel that way about it, and promptly shot the bear on the spot.

As we watched the fallen animal we were surprised to see that the black fur on its back moved and left the prostrate body. Then we saw it was a baby bear that had been riding on its mother's back when the sudden shot had killed her. The little creature ran around its prostrate parent making a pitiful noise.

I ran up to it to attempt a capture. It scooted into the sugarcane field. Following up with the beaters, I was at last able to grab it by the scruff of its neck while it snapped and tried to scratch me with its long, hooked claws.

We put it in one of the gunny bags we had brought for the meat, and when I got back to Bangalore I duly presented it to my wife. She was delighted! She at once put a coloured ribbon around its neck, and after discovering the cub was a 'boy' she christened it Bruno.

Bruno soon took to drinking milk from a bottle. It was but a step further and within a very few days he started eating and drinking everything else. And everything is the right word, for he ate porridge made from any ingredients, vegetables, fruit, nuts, meat (especially pork), curry and rice regardless of condiments and chillies, bread, eggs, chocolates, sweets, pudding, ice-cream, etc., etc., etc. As for drink: milk, tea, coffee, lime-juice, aerated water, buttermilk, beer, alcoholic liquor and, in fact, anything liquid. It all went down with relish.

The bear became very attached to our two Alsatian dogs and to all the children of the tenants living in our bungalow. He was left quite free in his younger days and spent his time in playing, running into the kitchen and going to sleep in our beds.

One day an accident befell him. I put down poison (barium carbonate) to kill the rats and mice that had got into my library. So did Bruno; and he ate some of the poison. Paralysis set in to the extent that he could not stand on his feet. But he dragged himself on his stumps to my wife, who called me. I guessed what had happened. Off I rushed in the car to the vet's residence. A case of poisoning! Tame bear—barium carbonate—what to do?

Out came his medical books, and a feverish reference to the index began: 'What poison did you say, sir?' 'Barium carbonate'. 'Ah yes-B-Ba-Barium Salts-Ah! Barium carbonate! Symptoms—paralysis—treatment—injections of...Just a minute, sir. I'll bring my syringe and

the medicine.'

A dash back in the car. Bruno still floundering about on his stumps, but clearly weakening rapidly; some vomiting, heavy breathing, with heaving flanks and gaping mouth.

Hold him, everybody! In goes the hypodermic—Bruno squeals—10 c.c. of the antidote enters his system without a drop being wasted. Ten minutes later: condition unchanged! Another 10 c.c. injected! Ten minutes later: breathing less stertorous—Bruno can move his arms and legs a little although he cannot stand yet. Thirty minutes later: Bruno gets up and has a great feed! He looks at us disdainfully, as much as to say, 'What's barium carbonate to a big black bear like me?' Bruno is still eating.

Another time he found nearly one gallon of old engine oil which I had drained from the sump of the Studebaker and was keeping as a weapon against the inroads of termites. He promptly drank the lot. But it had no ill effects whatever.

The months rolled on and Bruno had grown many times the size he was when he came. He had equalled the Alsatians in height and had even outgrown them. But was just as sweet, just as mischievous, just as playful. And he was very fond of us all. Above all, he loved my wife, and she loved him too! She had changed his name from Bruno, to Baba, a Hindustani word signifying 'small boy'. And he could do a few tricks, too. At the command, 'Baba, wrestle', or 'Baba, box', he vigorously tackled anyone who came forward for a 'rough and tumble'. Give him a stick and say 'Baba, hold gun', and he pointed the stick at you. Ask him, 'Baba, where's baby?' and he immediately produced and cradled affectionately a stump of wood which he had carefully concealed in his straw bed. But because of the tenant's children, poor Bruno, or Baba, had to be kept chained most of the time.

Then my son and I advised my wife, and friends advised her too, to give Baba to the zoo at Mysore. He was getting too big to keep at home. After some weeks of such advice she at last consented. Hastily, and before she could change her mind, a letter was written to the curator of the zoo. Did he want a tame bear for his collection? He replied, 'Yes.' The Zoo sent a cage from Mysore in a lorry, a distance of eighty-seven miles, and Baba was packed off.

We all missed him greatly; but in a sense we were relieved. My wife was inconsolable. She wept and fretted. For the first few days she would not eat a thing. Then she wrote a number of letters to the curator. How was Baba? Back came the replies: 'Well, but fretting; he refuses food too.'

After that, friends visiting Mysore were begged to make a point of going to the zoo and seeing how Baba was getting along. They reported that he was well but looked very thin and sad. All the

keepers at the zoo said he was fretting. For three months I managed to restrain my wife from visiting Mysore. Then she said one day: 'I must see Baba. Either you take me by car; or I will go myself by bus or train.' So I took her by car.

Friends had conjectured that the bear would not recognize her. I had thought so too. But while she was yet some yards from his cage Baba saw her and recognized her. He howled with happiness. She ran up to him, petted him through the bars, and he stood on his head in delight.

For the next three hours she would not leave that cage. She gave him tea, lemonade, cakes, ice-cream and what not. Then 'closing time' came and we had to leave. My wife cried bitterly; Baba cried bitterly; even the hardened curator and the keepers felt depressed. As for me, I had reconciled myself to what I knew was going to happen next.

'Oh please, sir,' she asked the curator, 'may I have my Baba back?'

Hesitantly, he answered: 'Madam, he belongs to the zoo and is government property now. I cannot give away government property. But if my boss, the superintendent at Bangalore, agrees, certainly you may have him back.'

There followed the return journey to Bangalore and a visit to the superintendent's bungalow. A tearful pleading: 'Baba and I are both fretting for each other. Will you please give him back to me?' He was a kind-hearted man and consented. Not only that, but he wrote to the curator telling him to lend us a cage for transporting the bear to Bangalore.

Back we went to Mysore again, armed with the superintendent's letter. Baba was driven into a small cage and hoisted on top of the car; the cage was tied securely, and a slow and careful return journey to Bangalore was accomplished.

Once home, a squad of coolies were engaged for special work in our compound. An island was made for Baba. It was twenty feet long by fifteen feet wide, and was surrounded by a dry pit, or moat, six feet wide by seven feet deep. A wooden box that once housed fowls was brought and put on the island for Baba to sleep in at night. Straw was placed inside to keep him warm, and his 'baby', the gnarled stump, with his 'gun', the piece of bamboo, both of which had been sentimentally preserved since he had been sent away to the zoo, were put back for him to play with.

In a few days the coolies hoisted the cage on to the island and Baba was released. He was delighted; standing on his hindlegs, he pointed his 'gun' and cradled his 'baby'. My wife spent hours sitting on a chair there while he sat on her lap. He was fifteen months old and pretty heavy, too!

The way my wife reaches the island and leaves it is interesting. I

have tied a rope to the overhanging branch of a mango tree with a loop at its end. Putting one foot in the loop, she kicks off with the other, to bridge the six-foot gap that constitutes the width of the surrounding pit. The return journey is made the same way.

But who can say now that a sloth bear has no sense of affection, no memory and no individual characteristics?

I will tell you next about quite a different sort of animal— a hyaena—which is also with us now and is my particular pet. His name is Jackie, and I got him under rather tragic circumstances.

Nearly fourteen months ago I was spending a night in the jungle. But the place and circumstances were different. It was at a spot named Sopathy, a rocky stretch on the Chinar river in the Salem district, and it was a moonlit night. I had not made a camp fire, but was sitting on one of the boulders overhanging a sandy stretch of the river. I was alone and had brought no weapon.

About ten o'clock I noticed an indefinable something moving along the sand in my direction. As it came closer I made out, by the peculiar loping gait, the slanting body and the grey form on which the black stripes were hardly visible in the moonlight, that it was a hyaena. When almost opposite me it halted abruptly and faced about, staring intently away from me at something in the jungle. I could see clearly its large, upstanding, bat-like ears cocked to catch the slightest sound.

Very soon the reason for its behaviour became evident. A wild dog, looking as grey as the hyaena in the moonlight, although it is actually a reddish-brown animal with an almost black, bushy tail, broke cover from the opposite bank of the river that was overgrown with jungle, and advanced on to the sandy bed. Almost immediately it was joined by five others of its kind. The hyaena turned about and tried to slink into the cover of the trees growing near the rock on which I was sitting. But the wild dogs caught the movement and without further ado attacked.

I have had occasion to remark before that wild dogs are fierce and implacable hunters. Except for man, elephants and bison, they will attack anything that moves, including tigers and panthers, and are quite unmindful of the losses they may sustain in the fray, so long as they eventually succeed in pulling down their prey, tearing it to shreds, and eating it while still practically alive. My own experience up to that time had been that wild dogs either regard hyaenas as cousins or beneath contempt and leave them alone. But that night was an exception, for the six dogs attacked the hyaena forthwith.

The hyaena tried to make a run for it, but his shambling feet moved too slowly and in an instant the dogs were upon him. The first attacker came too near. Like lightning, the hyaena switched around,

dipped its head at an angle, and closed its vice-like jaws on the dog's neck. I heard the dying wail of the stricken animal when the powerful teeth sank into its throat. The loud crunch of bones followed as the neck snapped like a dry twig. But the other five dogs piled themselves on to the unfortunate hyaena.

The *hyaena striata* , to give him his full Latin name, is no fighter. Rather, he is a cowardly, sneaking, skulking creature by nature, that slouches along the jungle, covering enormous distances in his search for carrion—anything that is dead, no matter how it died or in what stage of decomposition the carcass may be. For the hyaena is a scavenger. Very occasionally he may attack, kill and eat a stray goat, sheep or village cur, but that is only when driven by the pangs of extreme hunger. He will try to avoid a fight at any cost.

This unfortunate hyaena, whose plight I was watching, had attempted to slink away, but the dogs had been too quick. Realizing now that it could not escape, it decided to sell its life dearly. While the dogs squealed and 'whistled' in their curious fashion to attract reinforcements of their own kind, with rumbling, throatly growls the hyaena snapped right and left, scoring telling bites on its attackers, who screamed in agony. But the five of them were too many. They covered the hyaena's body, growling, biting and rending the living flesh from the bones. I knew that in another minute the beast would be torn to shreds.

I wanted to help, but I had no weapon with me—not even a stick or stone. For a second I contemplated scrambling down from the rock on which I was sitting and rushing to the rescue while driving the assailants off with shouts. But it was just possible that in their infuriated state they might resent my intrusion and attack. So I stood up from my place of concealment, showed myself, and started whistling and shouting at the top of my voice.

The combatants were so busily engaged in tearing each other to bits that it was some time before they heard the noise I was making. Then, one by one, the dogs ceased attacking the hyaena and turned around to look up at the rock on which I was standing. In the moonlight I could see the hyaena was in a bad way: no longer grey, but bearing large black patches that glistened even at that distance. I knew the patches were caused by the blood that flowed from many wounds. All the five dogs were injured, too. Some of them licked themselves or each other, as they looked at me and then back at their victim.

The hyaena seized the chance, tottered across the dry riverbed and disappeared into the jungle on the other side. A few minutes later the five dogs followed, intent no doubt in finishing the task. But I heard no further sound, and after the disturbance created by the din of

the fight, together with the noise I had made, no other animal showed up for the rest of the night.

With daybreak the thought occurred to me to follow in the tracks of the hyaena to see what had happened. This was comparatively easy, for although the ground on the opposite bank was too hard to show footprints, there was a clear trail of blood that had dripped on the grass and had been smeared on the leaves of the bushes. The trail led to a small knoll that was perhaps half a mile away. Close to the summit of this knoll were some large boulders, heaped one upon the other, with spear-grass growing around. Here the hyaena had made a last gallant stand and met death as the relentless pursuers had once again closed in.

One of the red dogs lay dead, stiffening in the long spear-grass that was lank and bent with the weight of the glistening dewdrops that still dripped from the ends of the stems. Only a few bones and the skull of the hyaena remained. Fragments of the grey and black-striped coat lay in shreds around me, most of them dyed a dark rusty-red with blood. But no carcass or flesh were to be seen. The dogs had eaten it all.

Hardly ten yards away was an opening between the tumbled boulders. No doubt it was the den to which the hyaena had been making its way when the attackers had moved in. As I looked upon the scene of carnage, a slight movement at the entrance to the den caught the corner of my eye. I glanced up to gaze into the frightened, sad faces of two baby hyaenas.

So the gallant animal who had fought the previous night against such odds had been a female hyaena, and not a male, as I had thought. Further, she had been a mother and had left two orphaned pups. I could see by their size that they were too young to look after themselves and would starve to death in three or four days. I determined to try to catch them. I retreated downhill the way I had come, in full view of the hyaena's pups. Then I made a detour and approached the hillock from the opposite side. I eventually hid myself behind the pile of boulders and waited for the puppies to come out of the shelter. I knew this would happen very shortly, just as soon as they grew hungry.

My chance came at last. They came out of their den side by side and advanced a few steps to gaze down sadly and wonderingly at the remains of their mother. That was when I pounced. I was fortunate enough to seize one of the pups by the scruff of its neck. But unluckily the other had heard or sensed my approach, and ran back into the cave.

Still holding my struggling captive, I went back behind the pile of boulders and waited for the second pup to come out again. But

although I remained for nearly an hour, it did not do so.

Meanwhile, by his constant struggling, the pup I held in my hands became difficult to handle. He bit and scratched and wriggled continuously. Once or twice he almost slipped from my grasp, and I knew if that happened I would never be able to catch him again. So, after another quarter of an hour I reluctantly decided to leave the second pup to its fate and walked back the five miles or so to the village of Pennagram, where I had left my car.

That was how I acquired Jackie, as I called him, for he turned out to be a male, and brought him back to Bangalore. For a few days I fed him on the bottle, with goat's milk, as I have found that cow's milk disagrees with most carnivorous wild animals because it lacks proteins. I supplemented the goat's milk with a few annas' worth of raw, minced mutton that could easily be digested and which at the same time afforded the essential proteins.

Jackie grew apace both in strength and size, soon outgrowing the need for goat's milk and minced mutton. Henceforth his diet consisted of raw beef and bones and it did not matter in the least whether this was fresh or in a high state of decomposition, crawling with maggots and swarming with flies.

Then Jackie met with his first mishap which nearly cost him his life. About thirteen miles east of Bangalore is a little settlement called Whitefield, consisting almost entirely of Anglo-Indian families. In this place a small five-bedroomed cottage, with verandah and kitchen and over half-an-acre of land was for sale for the sum of Rs 5,000, which in English money comes to about £375. My wife fell in love with this place, calling it a 'dinky' little cottage, and wanted me to buy it. I bought it, together with a village cur that had been deserted by her last owner but had remained on the premises. This dog at once attached herself to me. I named her Gypsy as appropriate to her antecedents.

I came to live in this cottage for a few days each week, returning to my home in Bangalore for the remaining days, and I took Jackie with me by car on these visits.

Now this cottage had been lying vacant for some time, and because of that the villagers around had decided to treat it more or less as their own property. Not only did they graze cattle and goats in the compound, thereby destroying the garden, but they had been lopping the trees for firewood and cutting the grass for their cattle, in addition to making the place a rendezvous for the graziers during the daytime. I tried to stop all this, but in vain. The only difference was that, instead of stealing wood by daylight, the villagers came on moonlit nights to do so, while their womenfolk came at break of day to cut the grass, in the manner of the early bird that catches the

worm. This led to complaints to the police and one or two 'personal encounter'. So the villagers decided to teach me a lesson.

Now I suffer from many bad habits, and one of them is to keep my dog inside the house at night, rather than let it loose in the compound. I do that because I have previously lost dogs from snakebite or from being carried off by panthers in jungly areas. Thus Gypsy came to be sleeping on a mat at the foot of my bed.

One morning, in the early hours, I awoke to the sound of her growling softly at the bathroom door. It was bright moonlight outside and the time was 3.10 a.m. Now a dog will not growl in that manner without reason. So, taking my torch, I softly opened the door and went into the bathroom. Gypsy brushed past me, halted at the outer door of the bathroom, which was also locked, and still growled ominously.

I was sure there was a snake about somewhere. I then remembered that a section of plank in the door, about two inches wide and three feet or so from the ground, was missing. I stooped down and peered through the gap. What I saw left me with mixed feelings. In the brilliant moonlight stood eleven men—I counted them easily—armed with staves and bamboos. Obviously it was a party of resentful villagers, come to 'beat me up' for my uncompromising attitude.

Even as I watched, one of the men climbed on the shoulders of another and from there on to the tiled roof which, at that spot, was only about nine feet off the ground. I guessed what he was going to do: remove a tile or two, come through the gap into the house, and then slip the bolt of the outer door to admit his pals. I felt very resentful.

Tiptoeing back to where my .12 bore shotgun was standing in the corner of my bedroom, I slipped two or three No. 8 gauge cartridges into the pockets of my nightcoat and returned to the bathroom. I was toying with the idea of scoring a quick right and left with the No. 8 shot into the legs of the assembly. But, just in time, I realized what would be the outcome; of course, a good many of the fellows would have 'sore legs' from the pellets, and perhaps one or two would have to go to hospital, but that would bring the police into the picture, and any amount or 'red tape'. Why did I fire? Why did I hurt so many men? Was it really in self-defence? I would have to prove that. The men might swear they had come with no evil intent whatever. But they would have a lot of explaining to do as to how and why they had come at that time of night. Altogether it would be a nasty business, requiring my presence at the police station and at court. So I overcame the strong temptation to pepper their legs and decided to fire a shot over their heads.

The report and flash of the gun in that silence caused the nine men who were still standing in a group to make off at top speed. The fellow who had put his companion on to the roof lost his nerve completely and screamed that he had been shot and killed, hastily amending that statement to one that he was dying. He was so afraid that his powers of locomotion failed him and he stood rooted to the spot, yelling at the top of his voice. The eleventh adventurer, who had climbed on to my roof, did not wait to scramble down. He jumped, landed on the ground with a thud, and recovering himself, made off like greased lightning. That broke the spell, and his comrade at last regained his wits and followed hotly in his wake. It all happened in a matter of seconds, and Gypsy and I were then alone.

I opened the bathroom door and went outside to see if any more of the miscreants were lurking about. There was not a trace of them. But there were a few 'souvenirs' left on the field of battle—or perhaps I could more aptly describe them as 'booty'. Three bamboo staves, one solid wooden cudgel which would certainly have broken my thick head had it descended thereon, and, of all things, two pairs of *chappals* or rough leather sandals such as the yokels in southern India usually wear.

The next morning I told the vendors who bring fruit, vegetables and eggs for sale from door to door that, in exactly three mornings from that day, I intended to sell two pairs of good *chappals* very cheaply to the first applicants. On the morning fixed for the sale two 'purchasers' presented themselves for the two pairs of sandals and offered to buy them. I announced that I was selling them at knock-down prices—only one rupee and eight annas each pair—about two shillings! The price was accepted and each man paid his money, took his pair of *chappals,* put them on and went away contented. I had little doubt that they had been the original owners of the sandals which they had discarded on that memorable night. After that there were no more attempts to break into my little cottage, and trespassers of all sorts became conspicuous by their absence.

My purpose in telling you this is to tell you that I became rather fond of Gypsy as a consequence. It all happened a little while before I acquired Jackie, so that when I started to bring him up and down to Whitefield from Bangalore he was quite a little fellow, while Gypsy was a full-grown slut, well on the way to becoming very spoilt.

The first calamity that befell Jackie happened when he tried to steal a bone Gypsy was eating. She bit him, and one of her teeth barely missed his left eye, gouging a deep hole just beneath it. An abscess formed and I thought I would lose Jackie, or at least that he would lose his eye, as he developed a high fever. The vet gave him penicillin injections, four lakh units at a time, till he had five such

injections. Then the abscess burst—outwards, fortunately—and his eye was saved as well as his life.

He grew quickly after that and soon outgrew Gypsy. But never once did he attempt to bite her, either in play or anger. He treats her as gently as a lady should be treated, and just loves to romp and gambol with her.

Feeding Jackie now became a problem, for at this time he was eating from eight to ten pounds of raw beef per day, and in Bangalore beef costs eight annas a pound, roughly eight pence! I did not feel justified in spending almost seven shillings a day on buying raw beef for him.

So I kept him permanently at my cottage in Whitefield where, with great tact, I had made friends with the two local butchers, who undertook to supply me with ten pounds by weight of beef, in the form of lungs, guts, tripe, liver, etc., daily, for six annas for the lot. That is, roughly six pence per day for ten pounds of miscellaneous beef!

This arrangement worked well for quite a time, when one day serious trouble befell me and Jackie.

I should tell you that what is termed as 'cow-slaughter' is forbidden in some parts of India, including Mysore state. The slaughtering of cattle is not allowed in these places, although the law does not forbid anyone from eating beef provided he can get it from a place where the prohibition is not in force. As with prohibition of alcoholic liquor, which operates in some states and parts of India and not in others, prohibition of 'cow-slaughter' in one place is an open invitation for brisk business in supplying meat from a neighbouring part of the country or state where that law is not in force. Thus Madras state is allowed by law to supply beef across the border into Mysore state and Bangalore, where cow-slaughter is forbidden. It is said that some individuals in parts of Mysore state, such as the Bangalore district, where the prohibition of alcoholic liquor is not in force, return the favour, although not legally this time, by supplying the prohibited item across the border to Madras state, which is a totally 'dry' area.

This is how Bangalore now gets its beef! But what about Whitefield? The butchers claim they also get their supply of beef from across the Madras border, which is about twenty miles away. But one day the police at Whitefield became suspicious and raided the butchers' houses where the meat was stored and sealed the doors. They said that cattle were being slaughtered on the premises. So, there was no meat for Jackie and he was ravenously hungry. What was I to do?

That night I took a sack and walked to the butchers' homes. The

police had sealed the front doors. But are there no such things as back doors, windows and skylights? And tiles can be removed to allow the entry or exit of a human body through the roof, can they not? The gentlemen who had visited me early that morning had given me the idea.

To cut a long story short, I came away with a sackful of beef, for which I had had to pay heavily, slung across my shoulders, and made for my little cottage across the fields, along the outskirts of Whitefield cemetery and then over a hill, till I had reached home dripping with blood that had soaked through the sack. At that time of night, had I been caught I would without doubt have been suspected of murder. But I had secured enough meat to feed Jackie for a whole week, although my little cottage stank vilely of rotten flesh after the fourth day. But by then the Police had come to understand that the beef came from Madras, and not from the unwanted cattle of Whitefield itself.

Jackie is with me now and becoming very big, and in appearance repulsive. But he is not at all fierce. On the contrary, his only aim in life is to romp and play. I leave him loose at times and he follows me about, comes out for long walks in the evening and does not harm children, sheep, goats or other dogs. He is passionately fond of little creatures such as puppies, kittens, chickens and the like.

At times his ideas of romping and playing are decidedly boisterous. Although Gypsy is very friendly with him now, she resents too much of his rough play, and she growls at him although he towers above her.

So to serve as a playmate for him I brought home from one of the butcher's houses a female puppy of the breed very definitely known in India as 'pariah dog'. She is about four months old, although Jackie is now over a year, and is approximately one-fifth his size. I have called her Jill. But she gives him all he wants in the way of exercise by chasing him, or being chased herself; romping, playing and even biting him when he becomes a little too rough for her. All this Jackie takes meekly. He is devoted to little Jill, who even snatches the raw meat out of his mouth. Never once has he bitten her; never once has he even growled at her.

Nor has he done either of those things to me. He is rather foolish, with far less intelligence than an average dog. But he is sweet and good-natured, rather like a buffoon among dogs with his grey coat, striped with black, his large head with sharply-pointed ears, the mane of long hair running down his neck and back like a ridge, his short hind legs, and his slouching, shambling gait. So you see, the hyaena is not such a terrible, fierce and loathsome creature as people may think.

We have had about eight panther cubs in all, most of them

rescued from their dens after the mothers had been shot. I remember that we lost the first two very shortly after we had acquired them, from gastritis! They also fall very easy victims to colic. Contrary to expectations, a panther cub is extremely delicate and dies easily, being nothing like so hardy as a bear or hyaena. Cows' milk disagrees with them entirely and proves fatal within a few days. Goats' milk seems to agree better, but has to be supplemented, even when they are very young, with a spoonful of minced mutton and mutton blood—not beef. As they grow older, beef can be substituted for mutton, but the quantity given to them at any one time has to be regulated. The need for mutton in the early stages is to compensate for the fact that, as I have remarked in an earlier book, in the wild conditions the mother helps the digestive processes of her cubs by first eating the meat of her kills herself and then vomiting it out for them to eat again. The cubs are gluttonous creatures and will gorge themselves till they can hardly move. That is when the colic sometimes attacks them, and as I have said, when they get colic or gastritis it is fatal.

Panther cubs are extremely playful and mischievous. They can recognize their owner from among other people. Although, as they grow older, their play becomes exceedingly rough, none I have had has been in the least fierce.

I remember one of them, a female which we named Spottie and kept for about nine months. She was a very sweet and intelligent creature. She would stalk my wife or me when we were reading or otherwise engaged when she thought we were not aware of her presence, hiding behind a door, or creeping up behind a chair or a table till she was close enough. Then with mock severity she would charge or pounce upon us. On such occasions she never once bit us, but tried her best to be gentle. Yet her claws were sharper than she realized and, as often as not, we would emerge from the game with at least a few scratches.

Some people have the notion that if a panther cub is brought up on boiled meat and soft foods it will not become ferocious. Well, for one thing this idea would not work out, for the cub would probably die! A panther must have proteins, and all the cubs we have kept have been fed on raw meat and given blood to drink as they grow older. Yet not one of them became in any way fierce because of this diet.

The female I have been telling you about, Spottie, died tragically one day, and this is how it happened. My son Donald shot a large sambar stag, and for some reason or other we wanted to see how much Spottie could eat of the carcass. So we allowed her to eat her fill. She gorged till she could hardly crawl. That very night she began to vomit and purge. In a few hours she growled and then screamed with pain and bit savagely in the throes of colic. By morning she was

dead.

Sometime later we acquired another cub, this time a male. We called him Spottie II. Benefitting from our earlier errors, we regulated his diet and kept him for over ten months in our house at Bangalore. During all this time he never once harmed a living thing. But we had responsibilities. There were tenants in the house and they had children. The children insisted on coming near the panther. Spottie II loved them and played with them. But we realized we were running a great risk. Finally, very sadly and reluctantly, we gave him to a friend, a Swiss gentleman, who eventually sold him to a German animal-dealer. The last we heard was that Spottie had been sent to some zoo in Europe.

Lately Donald brought home another panther cub. We have had him for about a month and he is not yet three months old. But this one we have called Grumpy, and he is with us now.

Then there is Ella the jackal. She plays with the dogs, cats anything, but loves to hide in dark corners, such as beneath an almirah. Ella gives her 'jackal call' occasionally at nights, but being a vixen she renders what might be termed as 'half notes' rather than the complete and peculiarly attractive full call of the male.

A villager one day brought for sale five jackal puppies, perhaps four to six weeks old, and thinking she might be lonely for want of company of her own kind, I bought them for Ella. That afternoon she was delighted and mothered them in a most touching manner. Around midnight, however, I heard the puppies screaming and found Ella had killed one and was in the process of devouring it. I rescued the other four, and next day, as I had nowhere to keep them, put them with Jackie, the hyaena. They tried drinking milk from him, which disconcerted the poor fellow dreadfully. Since then they have grown quite a bit, and so has Jackie. I kept them together for a considerable time and it was interesting to watch how he took upon himself the serious duty of looking after these four rascals. At feeding time Jackie could hardly finish his meat before the four jackals, who had already swallowed their own share, swarmed around him to steal what remained. Invariably, while he chased one of them away playfully, the other three would gobble up all that was left. Matters became so bad for Jackie that I was compelled to move the four jackals away and put them with Bruno, the sloth bear. He is not so good-natured as the hyaena at meal-times and swipes at the jackals if they come within reach of his paw, although in the afternoons and at night they sleep around and sometimes on top of him in his wooden box.

Meanwhile Ella, the adult female jackal, has grown clever too. She jumps onto the dining table, removes the cosy off the teapot, then the lid, and drinks up all the tea.

We have kept all species of the deer family. They are sweet and gentle, but not so interesting or intelligent as the meat-eaters or Bruno, the bear.

My father had a sambar doe for nearly ten years. He named her Flora. She was his special pet and loved him intensely. But as she grew older she formed a nasty habit of attacking strangers by rearing on her hind legs and striking at their heads with her fore hooves. This was because, being a doe, she grew no horns. Indeed, when she had perfected this technique she would often waylay our Indian cook-woman as she arrived from market. The poor woman would either be knocked down by Flora or run for dear life. In either case she would drop the basket of provisions she was carrying and Flora would eat all the contents except for the meat and the firewood.

I will just mention one more of my strange pets—and I still have her with me. She is Jemima, the python. 'Rock snakes' we call them in India. I caught her by the water-channel in the forest at Yemmaydoddi, and have had her for over seven years. She is quite tame and easy to keep. Don shoots a rabbit for her once a month. I buy a bandicoot— which is a big variety of rat, larger than a guinea-pig—from a man who catches them for me in traps at the market, at the price of four annas per bandicoot, once every fifteen days. That is as often as she eats. One night Don shot a mouse-deer. She swallowed it whole and would not eat again for nearly a month.

Now that you have heard about some of the strange animals and reptiles my wife and I have kept, let us have a sip of tea and nibble our sandwiches; for after this the serious business of listening to what the jungle may have to tell us will begin in earnest.

For a long time there is silence, broken now and then by the crackling of the fire or a loud 'putt-putt' noise, followed by the faint hiss of steam, that comes from the greener bits of wood, or those pieces that have moisture trapped within them. Then, from somewhere on top of the hill, above the road where we have left the car, a horned-owl hoots repeatedly, making a resonant, weird sound which nobody would normally think came from a bird. 'Whooo-oooo! Whooo-oooo!' For a long time there is silence again, broken periodically by the great owl, and now and then by the chirping, flitting nightjars, who do not seem to worry about the firelight.

We hear faint creepings and rustlings in the bushes growing a little beyond our camp fire, and from higher up the bank of the stream. They come in fits and starts—jerkily. But they seem to be always there, never for a moment ceasing altogether. They are nothing to worry about, for they are made by bush mice and bamboo rats which live in thousands in these forests. Harmless and inquisitive little creatures, but for our fire they would be running over our bodies in

their search for food, if we sat still enough and refrained from movement. Their presence is one of the reasons why snakes of all varieties, both poisonous and non-poisonous, abound here. The rats and mice, as well as frogs, afford an abundant food supply.

All of a sudden, from somewhere quite far away, we hear it: a cracking, crashing and thudding. Elephants! They are breaking down whole branches of trees merely to eat a few of the succulent new shoots that are just beginning to break at the ends of the stems.

'Quink! Quink! Quink!' A faint, sharp sound comes from the same general direction in which we just heard the branch broken. That means elephant calves; baby elephants!

But there is no reason to be nervous. If there are babies, it very clearly indicates that their mothers are about. In fact, a herd of elephants; for baby-elephants will not associate with a solitary male tusker. And an elephant herd is quite harmless unless you almost bump into one of the mothers, who will attack you in defence of her calf. But here, seated by the fire, we are as safe as in a house and have nothing whatever to worry about. Should their grazing bring the elephants in our direction, they will smell the smoke of our fire or see the flames, and they will make off without delay.

It is the solitary bull-elephant, wandering all by himself, that is dangerous. Generally, to be alone, he is either 'in *musth',* which is a periodic complaint attacking bull-elephants and lasting for about three months, when they become sexually excited and are turned out of the herd by the other bulls; or he is a confirmed 'rogue' who likes to keep his own company. In either case beware! There exists no fiercer, no more awesome, no more relentless engine of destruction in the whole Indian jungle. But if there had been a 'rogue' elephant about I would have known of it, as the Forest department intimates the presence of such animals to all game licence holders, in addition to issuing notices in the press. Even a rogue elephant, moreover, will hesitate to approach a blazing camp fire.

We listen to the sounds of the elephants grazing. Every little while comes the crack of a big branch, or the sharp snap of a bamboo stem, followed by the peeling, tearing sounds of the leaves being stripped from them by the giant pachyderms. They eat in silence, while a rumbling, like distant thunder, tells that the digestive processes are at work inside those colossal bellies. The calves 'quink' restlessly as they brush against their mothers, worrying them for milk, while at long intervals one of the herd-bulls will roar mildly, a bellowing sound resembling that made by an ox but infinitely louder and more cavernous. It is merely a call of contentment to indicate that all is well; or, maybe, junior has turned his efforts to worrying papa, who is admonishing him gently by roaring.

An enraged elephant, about to attack, makes quite a different sound. He screams piercingly, and that penetrating 'trumpet' will shake the very earth. It is a veritable call of doom, and there is no misunderstanding the feelings of rage, malevolence, and destruction which are involved in that terrible noise.

A frightened elephant will also scream and trumpet, but there is a wealth of difference in the tone. It is shriller and thinner in quality and volume, and appears to convey the elephant's feelings of fear and trepidation. It lacks that full-lunged menacing shriek that preludes the charge of an enraged bull. After a while there floats to us a dull, hollow thud: the herd has reached the bed of the stream, maybe half a mile below us, and the noise we just heard was caused by one of them turning over a fallen tree-trunk that had been lying there.

The rapt attention with which we have been listening to the elephants is suddenly disturbed by the hoarse, guttural call of a 'barking' deer, which is also named muntjac, kakar or jungle-sheep. 'Kharr! Kharr!' he repeats loudly in alarm from somewhere along the brow of a hill on the opposite side of the stream. A sambar in the valley takes up the note of warning with a startled 'Whee-onk!', followed by an intermittent 'Dhank! Dhank!' as he spreads the news of approaching danger.

Those calls can only mean one of three things: a tiger, the king of the jungle, is on the prowl—or his lesser cousin, a panther. They might also denote the proximity of a pack of wild dogs, the most vicious hunters in the forest, were it not for the fact that the night we have chosen is moonless. Wild dogs hunt by day or by moonlight, but never in the dark. So they are not the cause of the alarm in this case; either a tiger or a panther is afoot.

The cause of the hubbub betrays his identity a little later by a grating, sawing sound as he follows in the wake of the sambar down in the valley. 'Ah! Hah!, Ah! Hah! Ah!-Hah!' Disappointed that his presence has been discovered by the two vigilant deer, the panther vents his chagrin in a series of sawing-like, guttural, grating gasps.

All is silent again for a short time. We have almost forgotten about the elephant-herd till the sound of tearing bark reminds us that they are still feeding along the streambed and coming closer to our camp fire in the process. But as foreseen, one of them either smells the smoke or sees the glow of the fire. The elephant strikes its trunk hard against the earth while exhaling air sharply through that organ. The result is a peculiar metallic noise, resembling a sheet of zinc or galvanized iron being suddenly bent in two. That is an elephant's way of voicing its preliminary note of alarm.

Twice more the trunk strikes the ground sharply, and twice more the metallic sound follows. Then the elephant trumpets once—the

thin, shrill call of alarm and fear. The youngsters understand it and fall silent. All that can be heard is a faint, indefinable, swishing, brushing sound. It is made by the huge bodies as they try to press noiselessly through the undergrowth on the banks of the stream, the mothers pushing their bigger calves before them, or carrying the smaller ones with their trunks, which they have wound round the bellies of their off-spring before lifting them bodily off the ground. A few seconds later the faint swishing and rustling ceases. The herd has disappeared. Silence reigns once more. We hear no more of the panther or of the deer.

Our fire dies down for the moment, leaving only the glow of burning embers. We strain our eyes into the darkness on the opposite bank of the stream, and for a moment see nothing, as we have been gazing into the fire and our eyes have not yet adapted themselves. Then mysterious little lights appear, weaving singly and in twos and threes among the branches of the trees beyond the reach of our firelight. As the pupils of our eyes expand to explore and penetrate the gloom, we are surprised at the number of little lights that we can see. There seem to be thousands of them, as they flash, scintillate, fade away and then break out again, sometimes in bunches and at other times in myriads when, for a brief moment, they outline and illuminatte the towering trees and their boughs which have until now been indistinguishable in the gloom.

Fireflies! Thousands of them! Now here, now there, now appearing and then disappearing, only to flash forth again, they make a specatacle of ethereal charm which can never be seen in the inhabited parts of the land. No doubt the dampness of the atmosphere in the vicinity of the stream has attracted them. On some occasions, when I have been watching in the jungle, but without a camp fire, I have found the combined brilliance of an innumerable mass of these little creatures great enough to light the surrounding forest and make its details momentarily clear. Though such synchronized flashes occur only at long intervals and last only for a second or so, they are something that must be experienced to be believed, and they bring to one an ineffable sense of beauty and wonder.

We hear nothing more and the hours drag by. In spite of the fire, which we feed with fresh bits of wood from the pile, we can feel the air growing chill, and we can hear the dew beginning to drip from the leaves of the trees growing beyond the circle of warmth generated by the burning wood. I glance at my watch. The hands stand at midnight.

Would you be interested to hear about some of the superstitions of the aborigines who live in our jungle areas? They are firm believers in the existence of spirits; but with this difference—all spirits to them are evil. Even the spirit of a departed loved one becomes a malevolent

entity immediately after death, capable of, and sometimes bent upon, causing grievous bodily harm to the living. For this reason they will shun a human corpse, burial ground or cremation place. To ask an aborigine to sit with you over a half-eaten corpse serving as bait for a returning man-eater is tantamount to asking him to commit suicide. Infinitely worse in fact; for he feels he is certain to meet with a terrible and violent end.

He will explain that you are safe from the evil spirit, because you happen to be a foreigner. Even evil spirits dislike the foreigners, especially if they happen to be white men. But he, being just a miserable, defenceless jungle man, is certain to meet with a violent end, even as he sits close beside you. This anticipated end will invariably take place when the invisible spirit strikes from the rear: then the victim will collapse, become unconscious, vomit blood, and by morning will be dead. If you examine his back by daylight, in spite of his dark skin, he says, you will clearly see the five-finger mark of the spirit hand that struck him down. It will be the ghost of the dead man that will do the deed, as it seeks frantically to revenge its own violent end.

Even in the densely populated parts of the land, the towns and cities, it is quite common to hear that some man was struck down at night while returning home from night-shift at a factory, or perhaps from the late session at the cinema. The victim will say that he felt a heavy hand strike him violently in the back: he will stagger home, tell his relatives what happened and then collapse. He may vomit blood during the night, and the next day he will develop a high fever. But within forty-eight hours, with a few exceptions, he will be dead.

Such occurrences have often come to my notice and I have tried to investigate the causes, but without success. It is significant that it is only the ignorant, poorer working classes that experience such things. Particularly the servant class.

There is also a strong belief that, if a man has eaten or handled pork and goes out at night, if he is barefoot, he stands in great danger of being struck by an evil spirit, which detests pig's flesh. This idea is universal. I heard it first when I was a boy. I remember that I bought a piece of raw pork without delay, told my father that I was going to the pictures, but went to the gates of the cemetery instead, with the piece of pork. There I discarded my shoes, climbed over the gate and walked down the little lane between the tombstones, very fearfully clutching the pork. To this day I have never been so frightened as I was that night. Every single moment I expected a heavy spirit hand to clout me resoundingly from behind. But no spirit had struck me by the time I got back to my shoes. Sure enough, next day I had a fever. It was 'blue funk' fever!

Apart from the spirits of the dead, which are credited with doing these things, the aborigines in the forests, as well as the poorer working classes throughout southern India, are firm believers in what the spiritualists of western countries call 'elementals'. The Tamil name for such beings is *tninnispurams*. They are credited with belonging to both sexes—male and female: the male *minnispuram* is comparatively small, is rarely seen or heard, and is benign and harmless, but the female is said to be extremely tall (over ten feet) and is reputed to appear sometimes as a long black figure without head or arms or legs, and sometimes as a tall white figure, similarly headless, armless and legless. Another variety of the female *minnispuram* appears as a midget, gaudily dressed in a diaphanous, brightly coloured saree and bedecked with flowers and jewellery. These live in wells, tanks and rivers and are reputed to entice youths to the edge of the water and then to push them in and drown them. All forms of the female *minnispuram* are hostile to human beings, particularly to men.

My friend Byra, the poojaree, told me that he was once poaching for sambar in the Salem district, when one of these female *minnispurams* came upon him. Apparently he was sitting in a 'hide' he had constructed on the banks of the stream, which was dry at the time except for the artificial water hole he had himself made during the day by scooping a deep hollow in the sand. Into this hollow the water had percolated. At dusk he had sprinkled some of this water on the surrounding sand, so that the smell of water would attract the thirsty deer. When that happened, he would kill the first with his muzzle-loading flintlock!

Byra said that it was shortly after midnight when he heard the jingling of bells coming towards him from the left. As there was a curve in the bed of the Chinar river in that direction, he wondered with interest who could possibly be approaching at that time and place. He watched, and shortly what seemed to be a tremendously tall pillar of white mist turned the corner and floated down the centre of the dry riverbed, while the jingling of bells grew louder. Byra said he knew instinctively that it was a female *minnispuram*. He told me that for a few seconds he thought of running away, but if he did that the *minnispuram* might see him and give chase. So he decided to stay hidden.

Meanwhile the tall white pillar approached. It came opposite him, while the noise of jingling bells now changed into a sound more resembling the chink and clank of chains being dragged along the ground. He had just begun to congratulate himself that the *minnispuram* would pass by, when the terribly high white pillar halted on the riverbed directly before him. He heard demoniacal laughter in a high-pitched female voice.

Byra said he fainted. When he recovered consciousness the *minnispuram* had vanished. In its place, clearly discernable in the pale moonlight, stood a hesitant hyaena, which finally ran away. Byra says that if discovered *minnispurams* transform themselves into animals. He did not dare to move till daylight. Thereafter he never again went near that part of the river once darkness had fallen.

The belief in black magic, and the casting of spells, is universal in southern India, particularly along the west coast and in Hyderabad state. The sorcerers are not witches, however. They are men who have learnt the art from their fathers or have surrendered themselves to the practice after long years of initiation.

It is considered a simple thing to have someone 'bewitched' by one of these sorcerers. The cost of the operation will depend on how much harm one wishes to do. The simplest thing is to have the victim made sick, or to lose him his job, or to cause estrangement between husband and wife. A variation is to have him harassed by 'spirit' agencies, which throw stones on his roof at night and sometimes during the day, break crockery, put sand in his food just as he is about to eat it, and at times move the furniture about violently or throw him out of bed.

The worst form of magic is when the victim is made so ill that he dies. In such cases medical aid is fruitless, as no doctor is able to diagnose the malady. I have encountered several cases of 'spell casting' and I will tell you about two of them.

There was Oscar Brown, whom I came to know in 1936. Ossie' was a mild, good-natured fellow, jovial, carefree and happy. We became quite good friends. One day Ossie told me a story. He said that about three years previously he happened to be working in an office at Calicut. The staff were paid on the first day of every month, and a number of mendicants had formed the practice of presenting themselves at the office on every payday to get what charity they could from the employees.

Among them was a rather truculent-looking fellow with long hair, who wore a saffron robe. This man never failed to turn up on the first day of each month and demanded, rather than asked for, charity. He behaved as if he had every right to it. This habit had annoyed my friend Ossie, who, one day threatened to hand him over to the police. To that the saffron-robed man had replied: 'You dare to abuse me! I curse you, now. I will put someone into you who will be your constant companion till the day of your death.' With those words he strode away. Ossie went home and forgot all about it.

That night Ossie awoke, and through the mosquito-netting under which he was lying he saw the figure of a very tall black man standing by his bedside. Thinking it was a thief, Ossie sat up and began pulling

the netting aside, preparatory to springing out of bed. The figure then stooped over him and the next second appeared to merge itself with him. 'It got right into me,' were Ossie's own words. Then he said: 'Andy, do you know it is inside me now? It lives with me day and night. I cannot get rid of it. It won't go. Sometimes it overwhelms and overcomes me. Then I don't know who I am or what I am doing. Friends say my voice and appearance change. I behave differently, boisterously. To me it is all a blank. When I regain control of myself, I don't remember what happened. I don't remember anything.'

I began to suspect that my newly-found friend was slightly unbalanced mentally. Then I forgot the whole thing.

A couple of months later I invited Ossie to accompany me on a short trip to the jungle. By a strange coincidence, we camped on this very river, which I call the 'Secret River', but nearly twenty miles from here, beyond the village of Anchetty, at the spot where it joins the main river, the Cauvery. We had finished our meal and were seated beside a fire, talking about one thing and another. My .405 Winchester rifle, loaded but at 'half-cock', stood five or six feet away against a henna tree.

I forget which of us had spoken last. But I remember I was looking out over the Cauvery river which flowed past us, just a few feet away. And then a strange, gruff voice demanded, 'Who the hell are you? Where am I?'

I nearly jumped out of my skin. I looked at Ossie. Could it have been he who had just spoken? He appeared quite a different person. His eyes shone strangely. His face was twisted and distorted.

'What's the matter with you, Ossie?' I heard myself stutter.

'Don't call me Ossie. That's not my name,' he growled. 'Who are you? Where am I?'

I tried to pacify him. 'Don't you remember?' I asked. 'We came shooting.'

'Shooting? Don't lie! Where's the gun?'

Realization came to me in a flash. Ossie was raving mad, without a doubt. I had heard that lunatics acquire prodigious strength; if he found my rifle he might shoot me there and then. Fortunately he had not seen it, for it was behind him. I tried strategy. 'Behind me, there,' I indicated nonchalantly, pointing vaguely behind my back.

Ossie, or whoever it was that was speaking to me, strode past me, bent upon finding the 'gun', as he had called my rifle. I made a scrambling dive for the weapon. I reached it and swung around. Ossie had turned and was glaring at me. Controlling myself as much as I could, I said conciliatingly: 'I have found it. It was lying here.'

'Let me see it,' he had demanded.

'No, I can't,' I lied to him. 'There are tigers and elephants about

and I must always have this rifle in my hands.'

He did not answer, but walked across to the fire and started to put it out by kicking river sand on to the embers.

'Stop that, Ossie,' I shouted at him. 'We need the fire. The elephants might come.'

'I am not Ossie,' he replied flatly.

Then he swung around and advanced purposefully towards me. I backed a couple of steps and shouted to him to stop. But he did nothing of the kind.

'I want that gun,' was all he said, and he still advanced.

There seemed no way of stopping him, and I did not care to surrender the weapon. Then a thought struck me. When he was less than five yards away I raised the rifle and fired quickly over his head. He stopped dead in his tracks. Then he shuddered all over violently, as if with ague. Almost mechanically he raised a hand to cover his eyes and sighed. A few seconds later Ossie spoke to me again, but this time the Ossie I knew.

'What happened, Andy?' he asked. 'You look frightened.'

I remained silent, too shocked to speak.

'Oh, I see,' he went on. 'I have had one of my attacks, eh? That other self took control of me. Now do you believe what I told you the other day?'

'Only too well,' I rejoined. 'I thought my last moment had come and that you would shoot me—or force me to shoot you!' Then I added: 'Elephants or no elephants, you won't catch me spending another night alone with you, my friend. Let us start walking to Anchetty. Even if I tread on a snake, it is preferable to the experience I have just been through with you.'

I have related this incident to doctors, who tell me that the symptoms and the shuddering of the patient at the last moment are typical of hysteria. I have told it to others who profess to know something about occultism. They affirm it is a very definite case of 'spirit-possession' and that the shuddering always occurs when the foreign entity leaves the body it has temporarily inhabited. I do not know what to believe.

But the sequel to this story is that Ossie left Bangalore shortly after the incident. Two years later I heard that he died in Calcutta. He had jumped from the balcony of a three-storied building!

The second incident can be related more briefly. A friend in an oil company, stationed at Shimoga, got promotion over a colleague who resented it greatly. The aggrieved man went to a sorcerer in the same town. At the very next new moon strange things began to happen in the promoted man's house. Stones rained on his roof; sand was thrown in his food as he was eating it, apparently from nowhere

at all; crockery, tables, chairs and even beds were moved about; his baby son was lifted bodily and thrown down again, fortunately without harm. This went on for over six months, till the harassed man, finding no remedy or help, in sheer desperation resigned from the post to which he had been promoted. Simultaneously, all manifestations ceased.

It is commonly believed in India—this time by many of the educated and higher classes of both Indians and Anglo-Indians—that it is possible for a woman to make a man fall deeply in love with her and become so infatuated that he does not know what he is doing. A certain lady did this to a padre, causing him to desert his wife and three children. The practice is commonly known in India as 'pilling'.

The woman I have mentioned was questioned by a well-intentioned friend of mine, who remonstrated against the whole affair. Thereupon the woman, in a spirit of truculence, told my friend in detail how she made the 'ingredients' which caused the mischief and how she had administered it in black coffee. I have the recipe; it is not a wholesome concoction.

But I have not come across the other recipe, which a man should use to influence a lady—that is, excluding the use of the powdered tail of the big lizard known as the 'oodumbu' as an aphrodisiac, about which my old friend Byra, the poojaree, told me a very long time ago, and, of course, the powdered roots of the 'kuloo' water-plant, which I have mentioned in another story in this book.

Speaking of occult matters, I might mention that some years ago my son, Donald, and I set forth from Segur, at the foot of the Nilgiri ghat, to walk the fourteen miles of steep gradient to Ootacamund at the summit. It was past eleven at night when we left, and we had planned to reach Ooty before dawn. But when we were just half-way, at a place named Kalhatti, it began to rain and we took shelter in the travellers' bungalow standing at the end of a pathway just a short distance from the steep road.

This bungalow had long been reputed as haunted. The haunting was said to have originated in the following manner. A severely inebriated *shikari,* a European gentleman, had camped there one night before Christmas. At about 2.30 a.m. he saw what he thought was a sloth bear standing on the verandah of the bungalow. With creditable aim, considering his drunkenness, he had shot the bear, which began to scream. Thereafter he had emptied four more rounds into it from his magazine, and the animal screamed no longer because it was dead. But the only thing wrong with the whole proceeding was that it was not a sloth bear he had shot: it was a man, the bungalow-watcher, or *chowkidar,* himself, put there by the government to look after the rest house.

The local Badagas said it was this unfortunate man's uneasy spirit that now haunted the bungalow on certain nights. I know that when Don and I ran into the verandah to shelter from the rain, we were quite wet and it was bitingly cold. Moreover we were feeling inordinately hungry. Occult subjects were far from our thoughts just then. We wanted to find the man in charge, the one who had replaced the poor fellow who had been shot, to know if he could possibly brew us some hot tea.

So together we shouted: ' *Chowkidar!* Watcher!'

But nobody answered us. Then Don went one way, and I the other, around the bungalow to look for him. We met at the back of the building. Apparently the caretaker was not on the premises. Together we returned to the front verandah to shelter from the drizzling rain. A black figure stood at the end awaiting us. We both saw the man distinctly. The next moment, there was nobody there. It was just 2.30 a.m.

But enough of such a topic. It is nearly one o'clock and you look sleepy. Probably you are tired of listening to my tales. In that case we can finish what tea is left in my flask, throw the remaining wood onto the fire and snatch forty winks of sleep. Nothing will come near us, for the embers will continue to glow even when the fire dies down. But you will feel cold, so be prepared for it.

We do just that. We finish the tea, pile all the remaining wood onto the fire till we have a fine roaring blaze, and then curl up in the sand as close as possible to the burning wood. It is uncomfortably hot for the moment, but before long, as the flames become more feeble and only embers remain, we will be feeling the cold.

I awaken several times before dawn. Once I hear the distant calls of frightened spotted deer. Far away in the jungle one of them screams its last, the prey of some successful carnivorous hunter.

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1 See *The Black Panther of Sivanipalli,* George Allen & Unwin, London.

Four

The Black Rogue of the Moyar Valley

He was reported to be jet black and i did not entirely believe that tale till I saw him for myself. He was black all right, certainly the darkest coloured pachyderm I have ever seen, either in the wild state or in captivity. Also he was exceptionally hairy for a full-grown elephant, particularly around the top of his ponderous head. Elephant calves are all hairy, but as they grow up they tend to lose their hirsute appearance. However, the 'black rogue', as I have called him, although fully grown, had a distinctly shaggy aspect all his roguish days for, above all else, he was very definitely a 'rogue', and a nasty one at that.

But before I begin, let me warn you that this tale has rather a sad and unexpected ending. It closes with an experience I have never had before, and most certainly do not want to go through again.

The Moyar river flows from west to east along a deep valley that is all very dense jungle and the home of every species of big and small game of which southern India can boast, with the exception of the 'nilgae' or 'blue-bull', as it is sometimes called, a member of the antelope family that grows to the size of a sambar. Large herds of bison and elephant abound in these forests, and sambar and spotted-deer are plentiful. There are always tigers and panthers in residence, although they are not by any means numerous. This is rather a strange feature when one considers the abundance of game that would serve the two species of felines as food. Perhaps the presence of ticks—both of the large and small varieties—which infest the valley throughout the year, together with the leeches that are to be found in the damper parts, especially during the monsoon rains, keep tigers and panthers from remaining too long in the low river areas. Carnivores detest these pests.

The incident I am about to relate took place in the jungles of Mysore state which fringe that northern bank of the Moyar river, in the Coimbatore district to the northeast, and in the forests of the Nilgiris, or 'Blue Mountains' as they are called, which lie along the south of this rivulet, right up to its junction with another stream known as the Bhavani. Thus you will see. that, not only was an enormous tract of jungle involved, or rather several enormous tracts, but also the jurisdiction of three separate Forest departments. The Coimbatore and Nilgiris areas each have their own administration, although both fall within the orbit of Madras state: while Mysore, which was till recently an independent area governed by a maharajah,

is now a separate entity with a state government of its own.

Two large game or wildlife sanctuaries exist there. One of them, north of the river, falls within the boundaries of Mysore state and is called the Bandipur Game Sanctuary. Adjoining it, and south of the river, is the Mudumalai Sanctuary in the Nilgiri district of Madras state. The jungles to the northeast, belonging to Coimbatore, are called reserve forests, where hunting is only allowed under licence. There is a proposal to make this portion also a sanctuary, like the other two adjoining it, where hunting is altogether forbidden, so that the three sanctuaries will more adequately protect the game on both banks of the Moyar. The presence of the Bandipur and Mudumalai Sanctuaries gave protection to the black elephant while he was within them, so that he could only be hunted when he happened to cross into the forests of Coimbatore, or went further down the Moyar river into the Nilgiri jungles to the east, towards the Bhavani river and beyond the limits of the Mudumalai Sanctuary.

Due to the abundance of elephants everywhere, the aborigines and other people whose work took them into the jungles of all three jurisdictions were always on the alert. Nevertheless, it was a common occurence to hear of someone being chased by an elephant, while now and again isolated tragedies took place and people were killed. These latter were few and far between, however, and nobody paid much attention to them except to be very careful to avoid coming anywhere within sight, sound or scent of a wild elephant.

How the black elephant first made his appearance or came to be a rogue is obscure. Two versions persist. The first is that a titanic battle was waged, lasting intermittently for two days and two nights, within the precincts of the Mudumalai Sanctuary and was heard by the inhabitants of the little hamlet of Tippakadu, situated on the Mysore-Ootacamund Road. A narrow iron bridge, painted black, spans the Moyar river at this place, and during the afternoon of the second day of the fight the inhabitants of Tippakadu turned out and stood on the bridge to watch two bull elephants battling furiously a couple of hundred yards away on the river bank. They said that both the contestants were enormous animals, but that the bigger of the two was obviously getting the better of the fight, while his opponent, a slightly smaller, very black elephant, was red with the blood that poured from his head and flanks from the many injuries inflicted by his antagonist's tusks.

The other version comes from the village of Tallamalai in the forests to the northeast, belonging to Coimbatore, where an inhabitant proudly claimed the credit of having started this elephant off on his career as a rogue. A solitary bull formed the habit of systematically raiding and destroying the crops in the fields that surround the

hamlet. The shooting of elephants, even by the holders of game licences, is strictly forbidden by the government. Nevertheless, exasperated by the damage, this man one night fired at the elephant with his ancient muzzle-loader while it was in the midst of his field. He must have scored a hit, because large gouts of blood were found next morning leading from the cultivated area into the jungle. Of course, nobody followed up the wounded beast.

Many had seen this animal and all said it was a very black, very hairy elephant. Up to that time it had attacked nobody. After being wounded, the elephant left the vicinity of Tallamalai; some said it had gone into the jungle to die, while others thought it had left the locality.

It was over three months later that a herdsman, grazing his cattle, was attacked and killed by a very black elephant. Then the people remembered that an elephant that had been in the habit of destroying their crops, and had later been wounded, was a very black animal. So everyone came to the conclusion that it was this beast that had been wounded, while the owner of the muzzle-loading gun received considerable credit and became very proud of himself.

The second story is probably the true one, as it has the incident of the first killing to back it up, although it could equally be possible that the elephant that had received such a beating at Tippakadu had wandered down the bed of the Moyar, emerged in the jungle to the northeast, and come upon the unfortunate herdsman while still in an irritable mood, venting its spleen upon him by trampling him to a pulp.

Sporadic attacks occurred after this in all the three areas I have mentioned. But it is significant to note that the majority were in the Coimbatore forest region. There the elephant smashed a bullock-cart that was being driven from Dimbum to Tallamalai. Miraculously the two passengers in the cart escaped when it was overtuned and fled for their lives, but the driver and one of the two bullocks, as well as the cart itself, received the full fury of the elephant's wrath. The driver was literally torn limb from limb. The elephant had evidently placed a forefoot on his body and with its trunk had wrenched off both arms and a leg. The bullock had been gored through and through by one of the mighty tusks, and its spine was broken by a blow from the trunk. The cart was reduced to fragments.

It was strange that nothing happened to the remaining bullock. When the yolk was broken it had just galloped away, but the villagers said that its escape had not been without reason. It was quite black in colour, whereas the slain animal had been white and brown, and the cartman had been wearing a white *dhoti* or loin-cloth, a white *banyan* (vest) and a white turban. Here seemed evidence enough to emphasize

the dislike all wild elephants have for white. Thus, when travelling through elephant country in India you will observe that all mile and furlong stones, normally painted white with black numerals, are black with the numerals generally in yellow. The government has found, to its cost, that wild elephants pull the white stones out of the ground as fast as they are planted.

The two men who had escaped with their lives ran all the way back to Dimbum, whence they had started out, to report the incident. They stressed that the elephant was almost jetblack. They also said that the left tusk was shorter than the right one and curved inwards, while the animal was at least nine feet high, and abnormally hairy. This was the most detailed description of the elephant that anyone had given so far, and was accepted by the Forest department as correct. After all, these two men had been within ten feet when the enraged animal had upset the bullock-cart; they, if anyone, would know what the animal looked like.

The Collector at Coimbatore, which is the headquarters of the district bearing its name, was furnished with this description by the Forest department and asked to declare the animal a 'rogue' and free to be shot by anyone holding a district game licence. But before the declaration was made the elephant struck again, this time about midway between the hamlet of Mudiyanoor and the fairly large village of Talvadi, both situated on an extension of the same track leading from Dimbum to Tallamalai, but about eighteen miles further along it from the spot where the cartman had been killed.

The villager who was attacked was riding a bicycle. He was coming from Talvadi to Mudiyanoor, and was about halfway. And he was wearing a white shirt that hung loosely outside his white shorts. The elephant had evidently seen him approaching and was waiting beside the track; for when he drew abreast, out dashed the elephant upon the cyclist, screaming with rage.

The man both saw and heard the elephant coming, and instinctively did the only possible thing, which saved his life. He threw himself off his machine. Fortunately, at that spot the track ran along an embankment and the villager plunged down this into the bushes and long grass that grew densely on the slope. He disappeared from sight in the undergrowth as the elephant reached his fallen cycle and began to trample it into an unrecognizable, twisted mass of metal, trumpeting lustily and repeatedly in the process. The villager had the good sense to lie quite still. Most probably he was so terrified that he was incapable of movement anyway. The elephant forgot about him in its eagerness to destroy the cycle, which it did most systematically and thoroughly. Finally, tossing it down the *khud* and almost on top of its petrified owner, the pachyderm shambled away.

The villager lay in the bushes for over an hour till he was sure his attacker had departed. Then, smarting from numerous scratches inflicted by the thorns into which he had rolled, he painfully regained the track, where he looked desperately around, expecting to see the ponderous bulk of his attacker at any moment. But the coast was clear. Then the man bolted for all he was worth, running back towards Talvadi, whence he had set forth nearly two and a half hours earlier.

His description of the elephant tallied very closely with that given by the men who had escaped from the cart. He confirmed that the tusks were not uniform in size or setting, and that the elephant was very black. Shortly after this the Collector of Coimbatore issued his proclamation that the elephant was a rogue and free for shooting by anyone with a game licence.

As if he realized that a price had been set upon his head, the black rogue promptly disappeared from the area and was not seen again there till almost three months later. Meanwhile he chased and killed a Karumba within half a mile of the Ootacamund-Mysore state border, but within the Mudumalai Sanctuary, while the man had been poaching honey. This incident, however, was not taken very seriously, as it was considered that the thief had received just retribution for his misdeeds.

The trunk road that leads from Mysore city to Ootacamund, a beautiful hill station on the Nilgiri Mountains, 7,500 feet above sea level, passes through the heart of both the Bandipur and Mudumalai Sanctuaries, which cover the foothills at the northern base of that lofty range. After leaving Tippakadu, the village where the epic battle between the two elephants had taken place, the road begins a climb of about forty miles, passing a place named Gudalur and negotiating many hairpin bends through extensive coffee, tea and chincona estates before reaching Ootacamund. The road is tarred and excellently maintained by the governments of Mysore state and the Nilgiri district of Madras. It carries moderately heavy traffic, ranging from the private cars of the many visitors to the hills, to Ooatacamund.

At Tippakadu another road branches southeast and covers twenty-one miles before reaching Ootacamund by a shorter route. It crosses the black bridge over the Moyar river from which the villagers had watched the elephants fighting, passes three villages named Masinigudi, Mahvanhalla and Segur respectively, and then climbs up a very steep *ghat* road to Ootacamund itself. Although only half as long as the main road, this route is scarcely used because of its extreme roughness and its steepness, especially around the hairpin bends; it is definitely dangerous for all but exceptionally good drivers using vehicles of high horse-power and brakes in tip-top condition.

The main road from Bandipur to Gudalur and the shortcut route

from Tippakadu to Segur, at the foot of the steep *ghat,* were periodically visited by the black rogue for three months or so after the Collector of Coimbatore had officially declared him a rogue. But this declaration covered only the forests to the northeast of the Moyar river which, as I have told you, belong to the Coimbatore district. It did not apply to the Mysore and Nilgiri areas, where the elephant had not yet been declared a rogue and was thus still protected. But growing bolder with each escapade, the black elephant hastened his declaration before, sometimes chasing motor cars on both roads.

At Segur he all but added an Englishman, a friend of mine named Collett, to his bag of victims. This gentleman had gone out for an evening stroll with his shotgun and pack of five mongrel dogs, hoping to get a peafowl, junglecock or perhaps a rabbit or brace of partridge for dinner. What he succeeded in bagging I do not know, but towards evening he was sitting on the bank of the Segur river, which is a tributary of the Moyar, his back against a tree and his five dogs round him, when who should come down to drink water but the black rogue himself. He spotted Collett at once and, with his usual shrill scream of anger and hate, charged him forthwith.

My friend had only a shotgun which is useless against an elephant; he had also a permanent injury to his right leg, which made him walk with a slight limp. It certainly prevented him from running or from climbing trees in a hurry. The scene was all set for another murder had not the five dogs, all country-bred, decided to take a hand in the matter by counterattacking the elephant. They ran around him in circles, yapping furiously. This so distracted and enraged the pachyderm that he forgot all about his intended victim and tried to trample the dogs, or seize one of them in his trunk. But the mongrels managed to keep out of reach, and the annoyed elephant dashed vainly in all directions. For no sooner did it concentrate upon catching one of the dogs, than the other four were yapping at its heels. Collett hid behind a tree-trunk and, when the elephant was not looking, managed to reach a footpath in the jungle along which he beat a hasty retreat to the best of his limping ability. Shortly after he had reached his bungalow, the five dogs turned up, all unhurt and panting happily from their exertions.

After about three months the elephant found his way back to the Coimbatore jungles and was not long in claiming another victim there, a villager from a hamlet called Jeergalli which is situated, as the crow flies, about halfway between Mudiyanoor and the deep valley to the southwest through which the Moyar river flows.

Shortly after this incident, an American tourist who was visiting Bangalore came to see me and asked if I would conduct him to some place where he could take movie-pictures of bison. He had visited

some of the well-known game sanctuaries of Africa and had a magnificent collection of movie reels of all the game there, including rhino, lion and the great herds of African elephants, which he showed me. He said he now wanted a reel or two of tigers and the Indian bison. I explained that tigers, unlike lions which inhabit open country, live in jungles where pictures cannot easily be taken. But I assured him that it would be comparatively easy to photograph the bison. The outcome of this visit was that he agreed to come with me in his car on a three-day trip, and we started the next morning.

Now I know of no better place than the forests of Coimbatore for photographing bison. Not only are these animals very numerous there, but the jungle is less dense than in some parts of Mysore, and certainly far less thorny. On the way I picked up my old jungle friend and companion, a Sholaga named Rachen, from his hut in the hamlet of Gedesal, and drove on to Dimbum, where we branched off westwards to another hamlet named Honathetti, situated about seven miles along the Dimbum-Tallamalai road. I knew that bison were particularly prolific there.

Due to two punctures and other minor delays, it was nearly 4 p.m. when we arrived at our destination. There was hardly time to start looking for bison immediately. Besides, as everyone knows, evening is not the best time for photography. So I told my American friend that we would spend the night under a tree close to the village and start operations the following morning. Meanwhile we got talking to some of the inhabitants of the place, to whom I explained our mission. They were highly disappointed to hear that we had not come on a regular hunting-trip and tried hard to entice us to sit up that night over a water hole to shoot a sambar for them, for meat. Now not only is shooting over water holes forbidden, but is very unsporting, and we tactfully but firmly refused.

A large number of Sholagas from the hamlet gathered around our camp fire after dinner that night, and one of them volunteered to take Rachen along at dawn next day to pick up the tracks of the nearest bison herd. The plan was to follow the herd till it had bedded down for the day and then come back and tell us. Bison do not move far during the hot noonday hours and it would then be a fairly simple matter for us to accompany our Sholaga guides, get up wind of the place where the bison were resting and move closer cautiously hoping to be able to take some pictures before the herd became scared enough to rush away.

Once our plans were made, we began to talk of other matters, and in the course of conversation the black rogue was mentioned. Naturally, his evil reputation had spread far and wide, but he had not so far molested any of the inhabitants of Honathetti, although he had

been seen rather infrequently by a few of them. That had happened some months ago, however, and the consensus of opinion was that he had gone away for good. Nobody thought much about him thereafter.

It was scarcely daylight when the Sholaga from the village put in his promised appearance and took Rachen with him to look for the tracks of any bison that might have passed during the night. He assured us that he felt confident of finding them, for bison were very plentiful in the low hills and jungle around his village.

My friend had no game licence and I was not particularly keen on hunting feathered game, so we spent the next few hours lounging in the camp while listening to the early morning crowing of the junglecocks and the harsher calls of peafowl. The sun was well up and it was getting decidedly hot when the two Sholagas returned, just before ten o'clock, to tell us that they had succeeded in picking up the spoor of quite a large herd of bison, which they had followed for another two miles till they came upon the animals settled for the day by the banks of a small stream that skirted the base of a hillock. From experience they knew the bison would rest there till evening, before they started moving again.

According to the Sholagas, we had at least four miles to walk to this place. Sholagas, like all aborigines, have a very hazy idea of distances, so that I knew we would be lucky if we reached the place in less than six miles. I remember the sun was abnormally hot that morning, so that it was from sheer laziness that I decided to leave my rifle behind. Carrying it for twelve miles did not seem an inviting prospect. Besides, as I have told you, we had come on a photographing mission, and not to shoot.

We set out accordingly, my friend and I sharing the burden of his camera and auxiliary equipment. It was well over three miles, as I had expected, and not just two miles before we came upon the herd's. It was undeniably fresh. The stems of the grass upon which the animals had fed, and their droppings, indicated that fact clearly.

We started following the wide trail and we had covered another three miles before Rachen and the other Sholaga pointed down the low hillside on which we stood. At least another mile away we saw the shimmer of water, almost hidden by trees, that marked the stream where the herd had decided to rest for the day.

The next thing to do was to test the direction of the wind in order to get up-wind of our quarry. Bison have keen scent, and to approach them down-wind would definitely mean that they would detect our coming and leave cover. Luckily we found that the breeze was blowing uphill; that is to say, from the bison towards us. This meant that we would not have to make a detour but steal downwards upon the herd by following their tracks of the night before.

I have mentioned that the stream was quite a mile away. The hillside sloped gently downwards. It was fairly open, park-like country, with scattered and rather small trees, long lush grass, and a few outcroppings of rock here and there. The Sholaga from Honathetti led, as he knew the way, closely followed by the American and Rachen, while I brought up the rear. The sun blazed brightly down upon us from a steely-blue, cloudless sky. Everything appeared serene and peaceful.

Confident in the abilities of the two Sholagas, as trackers and as men well-skilled in jungle lore, I was walking along thinking of nothing in particular when I happened to notice Rachen glance backwards, the way we had come. He stopped abruptly and uttered the ominous words: *'Dorai, annai varudu!',* which means, 'Sir, an elephant approaches!'

Looking in the same direction, I was dismayed to see that an elephant was indeed heading through the scattered trees and directly towards us. He appeared to be only a furlong away. There was no mistaking the purposefulness of the shambling run. There was no hesitation, no sign of timidity or fear, no attempt to avoid us and slink away. This elephant was bent upon reaching us just as fast as he could.

I knew what would be his next step. As soon as he felt he was close enough he would raise his scream of hate and charge down upon us. A normal elephant would have behaved quite differently. As soon as he had scented or seen human beings, he would have done his best to get away. But this animal was deliberately following us, and there was a sinister, evil purpose about him. Without any doubt, here was the rogue I had heard so much about. Even at that distance, he seemed mahogany-black.

Neither the Sholaga who was leading nor my American friend was yet aware of his presence, for he made no sound as he approached. Fortunate, indeed, that Rachen had looked back and observed him. Otherwise at least one of us would have died very painfully that day!

Desperately I gazed around, looking for a way of escape. As I have said, the trees were small. There was not one that the elephant could not push over easily. But about 200 yards away and to our right, I could distinguish a rock half hidden from view by the boles of intervening trees. I had no means of knowing how big it was or how high. But it was a rock and it was our only refuge.

Refraining from shouting, as I did not want the elephant to hear me and perhaps precipitate a charge, I called softly to my American friend: 'Follow me to that rock to our right. The rogue elephant is behind us. Run for it!'

The effect on him might have been called amusing under less strained circumstances. He stopped dead in his tracks and gazed around confusedly.

'What's that?' he asked. 'Where?'

Running forward, I grabbed his arm and started pushing him towards the rock, while I tried to break into a run myself. Meanwhile Rachen called a low warning to the other Sholaga.

The elephant had been shambling forwards and was only a little over half a furlong away. Undoubtedly he had seen our quickened movements and guessed that his presence had been discovered. For without further ado he trumpeted shrilly. Then he charged!

My friend threw down his camera and the four of us ran, as fast as we could run, for that rock. Regardless of the long grass, the thorns and the intervening trees, we covered the ground at a most creditable speed with the elephant, now trumpeting repeatedly, behind us. Being but a short distance from the rock we managed to maintain our lead and reached our objective about 100 yards ahead of our pursuer.

It was a low, sloping rock, hardly three feet above ground level at one end, and about five feet at the other. But there was no other avenue of escape and we leapt upon the rock almost together. It may have been about thirty feet long. Without stopping, we ran up the slope to the higher extremity. There was a fissure in the rock, from one end to the other. Coarse grass grew in this declivity.

Breathlessly we reached the higher end of the rock and then turned to see what the elephant would do. The infuriated rogue made directly for us, and as we stepped backwards and out of reach of his extended trunk he came to a halt with the bottom portion of his chest against the stone. In this position he continued to trumpet deafeningly, alternately blowing blasts of air at us through his trunk. After a few moments the elephant realized we were out of reach. His next action was to uproot the shrubs growing nearby and, holding them with the tip of his trunk, he tried to flog us with them. Of course, we stepped further backwards, but it did not occur to him to come around the rock to its lower end. Instead he found a piece of loose stone and hurled it at us, narrowly missing my friend.

It took the beast ten minutes to think of reaching us from the opposite end; then things began to happen in real earnest. Evidently the idea came to him suddenly, for he abruptly stopped trumpeting and, with a surprising turn of speed for his bulk, shuffled around the rock to the other end. There he found the rock only three feet high. Placing one ponderous forefoot on the granite, he cautiously tested it for stability and in the next few seconds had climbed onto the rock and was coming straight for us.

It was now that Rachen exhibited a marvellous coolness of nerve

and thought. For he called in Tamil: 'Jump down quickly. The elephant will not attempt to follow us that way. It is too steep and he will be afraid of breaking a leg!'

Suiting the action to his words, he jumped, and the three of us followed without delay. My friend then started to run for it, but I caught hold of him and said: 'Stop. He won't attempt to jump five feet to the ground with his ponderous weight; but if we leave this rock he will go around and catch one of us in the open.'

The rogue reached the edge of the rock, where he towered above us—a truly awesome sight! Once more he tried to reach us with his trunk and then waved one forefoot in space as if to try a leap. But he thought better of it and restrained himself while he screamed with hate. We stood beyond his reach and awaited his next move.

After perhaps a minute he swung around and rushed back to the lower end. Hesitating again, he finally stepped down gingerly and turned to come around the rock and catch us. So we drew ourselves up those five feet and got to the top only seconds before he was below us again, and at the spot at which he had first arrived.

Twice more the enraged bull shambled around the rock and climbed up from the lower end. Twice more we leaped down those five feet and stood just out of his reach at the base. It was a game of catch-as-catch-can in real earnest, with the prospect of a terrible death by being trampled upon and torn to shreds if one was late by a split-second, either in jumping down or climbing up again. If there had been only one or two of us in this lively bit of gymnastics, it would not have been so bad. But as there were four, we kept getting in each other's way, particularly when it came to climbing up the five-foot ledge. With an agonizing death as the penalty for being a fraction of a second too slow, it was every man for himself.

Worst of all, perhaps, was the nerve-shattering screaming of the elephant. The very air vibrated with the sound and it required a mighty effort of will not to become rooted to the spot in terror. Fortunately, after the third attempt, the enraged animal either grew tired or came to realize he could not catch us this way. It was a mistake, however, for had he continued we would have become exhausted and sooner or later he would have caught one of us.

But he desisted and now started walking around the rock on which we stood, every now and again rushing up to it and attempting to reach us with his trunk. Each time he did that, we scampered in a bunch to the opposite end, where we would wait till he came around and we scampered back again. While all this was going on I was cursing myself for my sheer laziness in not bringing my rifle. The sun was almost directly overhead and blazed down upon us from a cloudless sky. Waves of heat arose from the rock and shimmered in

the still air. Hastily I glanced at my wristwatch. It was almost noon.

Eventually the heat and the sun began to be felt by the elephant himself. He ceased his strenuous tactics and stood in the shade of a tree just a few yards away. There he stayed put. An hour passed in this manner. The granite rock on which we stood became unbearably hot. The heat penetrated the rubber soles of my shoes, so that I could stand on two feet only with difficulty. It was even worse for the two Sholagas, for they were both barefoot; they fairly hopped on the rock as the heat burned the bare soles of their feet.

A crazy idea came to me to try to frighten the monster away. I told my three companions to start shouting for all they were worth, and I joined their chorus of discordant yells. But far from alarming him, our voices caused the elephant to charge us once again, and this time he came straight onto the rock from the three-foot end. In a group we jumped down from the other end and stood out of his reach once more, while he literally danced with rage at the brink above us. All four of us knew that if he but made the leap, one at least of our number would not see the light of another day. But although furious, the elephant was cautious and did not jump. He remained on the rock and screamed and blew air in our faces with his extended trunk.

It was very likely that after a while the heat from the stone began to penetrate even the thick soles of his mighty feet, for he kept lifting his legs up, one at a time, in quick succession. Then he turned and lumbered off the rock from the lower end. In a bunch, the four of us scrambled up the burning stone again. This time we remained silent, watching the brute who was also watching us.

This stalemate continued for another few minutes, then the rogue turned abruptly and shambled over the hillock from which he had come and disappeared from view. I began to congratulate myself that we were well rid of him when both the Sholagas said they thought it was a ruse and that the elephant was only trying to draw us off the rock. So to test this theory, all four of us descended and walked about fifty yards away. Suddenly came a crack and crash of breaking wood, a scream of hate, and there was the rogue charging down upon us from quite another direction. Up the rock we scrambled once more.

The elephant kept us another half hour. Then he walked off again, this time heading for the stream where the bison herd was sheltering. Being downhill, we could see him for some distance till his black form was finally hidden by the intervening trees. Suspecting he was up to his old game, we did not leave the rock, but asked the Sholagas to climb two of the highest of the trees to see if they could catch a glimpse of him if he made a detour and tired to approach from another direction. They did this and after a while signalled that the coast was clear.

When the Sholagas rejoined us, Rachen said that the pachyderm had probably felt the heat and had gone off to the stream for a drink and a bath. After that, he said, it might return and stay by the rock till night fell.

The idea of playing that ghastly game of hide-and-seek with this black monster in pitch darkness terrified me. Handicapped by being unable to see him clearly, I was sure one or other of us would eventually be caught. I suggested we run for it before the rogue came back, a plan which met with unanimous approval.

I asked Rachen to retrieve the American's camera, which he did at once. Then the four of us stepped off the rock and headed for the village. Many were the glances of apprehension that we threw behind us to see if we were being followed as we ran at a jog trot towards Honathetti. But clearly the elephant had really gone for water, for he was nowhere to be seen. Streaming with perspiration and panting from our exertions in the terrible afternoon heat, we reached the village at a quarter to three, glad to have escaped with our lives from a ghastly death.

I was tired and angry. Above all else, I was ashamed. For nearly three hours my companions and I had been engaged in a cat-and-mouse game wherein we had most definitely been the 'mice'. Now that I had my rifle in my hands, weary as I was, I determined to return immediately with the Sholagas and try to find the black elephant once again and continue the game, but this time with the position reversed. I would very soon show this arrogant pachyderm that he was going to be the mouse.

My American friend wanted to come back with us, and if possible take pictures of the elephant's discomfiture. But his presence would have been an unnecessary responsibility, apart from hampering my movements. Very politely, but firmly, I reminded him that he was a photographer and not a hunter. Good sportsman that he was, he understood and did not take offence, although chagrin was written large on his countenance.

Walking fast, and sometimes trotting, Rachen, the second Sholaga and I made for the rock. This time we moved boldly forward through the park-like belt of jungle that surrounded the place and reached it within the hour. There was no elephant to be seen. It was just four o'clock and we had a little over two hours of daylight in which to find the elephant, something that is easier said than done, considering he had the whole jungle before him. But I remembered I had two Sholagas with me. The aborigines, who have lived in the forests for generations, are among the finest trackers anywhere in the world, so there was a reasonable chance of coming up with our quarry.

We moved in the direction in which the pachyderm had disappeared. The jungle was dry, and he had not been feeding but moving directly towards the stream, so that, in spite of his great bulk, his passage through the undergrowth and long grass would not have been evident to an inexperienced eye. But Rachen and his companion had no difficulty in finding it. It was interesting to observe how their trained sight detected every stem of grass that had been bent or broken by the passing animal, and every leaf or twig that had been stamped flat under those giant feet.

Following this trail, it did not take us very long to arrive at the point where the black elephant had reached the stream. Lank reed-like grass grew there and we could clearly see where he had forced his way through it to the water's edge. Rachen strode into the stream, which reached to just above his knees, and at the spot where the elephant had drunk water he turned and began to walk upstream along the trail marked by the crushed reeds and water-plants, while the other Sholaga and I walked parellel to him along the bank.

For some reason the elephant had not crossed the stream, but after wading in the water for about 100 yards had come back to the side on which we stood. Evidently he had drunk his fill, for his plate-like spoor, imprinted at the edge of the bank and still clouded with the muddy water that had seeped in, left the little rivulet after a short distance and led back into the jungle.

We followed this trail closely, knowing that the rogue would now be feeding and that we could expect to hear him before long if he had not already travelled too far inland. It was hot and he might even make for the water a second time for another drink. But that would be a little later, towards sunset, when elephants usualy drink. We had more than an hour before us and could expect to find our quarry feeding inland and at a considerable distance from the river.

As we surmised, the trail turned into the jungle. The elephant had been in no hurry, for he had halted now and again under some of the shadier trees and had evidently been lazing about while sheltered from the sun.

Nearly a mile was covered in this fashion when we first heard the unmistakable crack of a bough being torn down. The branch evidently had a thick layer of bark, for the crack was followed by a twanging sound as the elephant tore the wood from the tree, stripping and pulling the bark from the main limb when it did not break easily. From the volume of the sound and its direction, our quarry was easily a couple of furlongs distant.

If you should ever want to approach anywhere near a wild elephant, the most essential thing is to test the direction in which the breeze is blowing. Having done that, you must work your way into

such a position that the wind is blowing from him to you. Should you neglect to do this and approach downwind instead, or even partly downwind, the elephant's keen sense of smell will make him aware of your coming. Then one of the two things will happen. A normal elephant, and often a rogue too, when his instinct warns him that you are no ordinary passing peasant but an enemy, will just fade noiselessly from the scene, and when you reach the spot where he was standing you will find nothing. Alternatively, the elephant may ambush you by waiting silently behind rock, a tree, or a clump of bamboo, till you are very near him, when he will charge at you screaming, flattening every obstacle in his way. This is a favourite habit of rogue elephants, particularly one who has already killed a number of people and has come to realize the utter helplessness of that most obnoxious biped, man!

I tore a handful of grass from the ground, held it aloft in my hand, and then slowly released the broken blades and stems, allowing them to fall to the ground singly. They all drifted from right to left. That meant the wind was blowing from the right and that I was in a midway position, being neither up-wind nor down-wind from my quarry who was directly ahead of us. This was not good enough, so we all turned to the left and made our way forward in single file, as silently as we were able, around the intervening bushes and tree-trunks. We covered over two furlongs in this way when the sound of another crack came to us from a half-right direction. It was fainter this time.

Once again I tested the wind to verify that it had not changed its course. Then we all turned to the front and crept stealthily forward in single file and at angle of ninety degrees to the direction which we had just been following. We might have covered anything up to 200 yards in this fashion when the elephant broke a third branch. This time the sound came from due right. We had detoured enough and were now directly upwind. He could not possibly get our scent unless he himself moved to some other place. Now we had only to be sure we made no noise approaching him, and then he would be at my mercy.

In single file we moved forward, Rachen leading, with me in the centre and the Sholaga from Hanathetti behind me. Judging by the last sound we had heard, the elephant was at least a quarter of a mile or more away. We covered that distance slowly, but heard no further sound. Probably the rogue had already brought down enough branches to provide him with a succulent repast of green leaves and was busy eating them.

A few paces further forward and the ground dropped into a small valley, formed by two low hills. The elephant was clearly in the valley. But such places are unfavourable for stalking an animal with

such an acute sense of smell as an elephant, because the hills on either side often cut off any breeze, so that in the still air the smell of human being, particularly when there are three of them together, is carried to the elephant in the motionless atmosphere. That is just what happened, for the elephant got wind of us. Instinctively he knew his enemy was approaching and he slunk stealthily away.

When we came to the place where he had been feeding we found the broken branches and his fresh dung, but of the elephant itself there was no trace. Working together now, the two Sholagas began to follow his track, with me close behind to cover them. It was an easy task. The pachyderm had moved along the little valley which soon ended in the dry bed of a rather big *nullah.* His large footprints, clearly visible in the powdery earth, showed that he had turned down the *nullah,* which obviously led back to the stream from which we had lately come, now well over a mile away. We knew that if he reached the stream he would cross it and probably escape on the other side. Evening had already set in and there was scarcely an hour of daylight left. The only course left to us was to cast caution aside and chase after him to get in a shot before it was too late. So we began to run down the *nullah.*

No doubt the rogue, hearing us and by now thoroughly alarmed, started to increase his pace as well. After half a mile or so I was fairly blown, although the two jungle men with me showed no trace of their exertions. The *nullah* turned in its course and then straightened out. Far ahead of me, and shuffling away for all he was worth, I could see the black rogue—or rather the hind portion of him—heading for the stream. I did not want to fire, as the most I could do was to wound him in the hindquarters, and I do not like wounding any animal, even a rogue elephant, deliberately. So, puffing and blowing and badly out of breath, I followed as best I could.

The elephant disappeared around the next curve. In due course we reached the same bend, turned it, and saw the stream a couple of hundred yards ahead. But just before the stream was the elephant, or rather half of him, for his back was still turned towards us, while his body was twisting and turning, without seeming to make any progress.

Struck with surprise and wondering what could be delaying him, we put on a spurt, or rather my companions did. As for me—well, I could not have put on a spurt even if the elephant had been behind me! However, I drew abreast of them at last, and found that the elephant was stuck fast in a quagmire which reached up to his belly. The explanation was simple enough. The spot where the *nullah* met the stream had become a bog, due to the soft sand in the *nullah* being saturated with the water that seeped into it from the stream. The

elephant, scurrying away in fear, had blundered straight into it.

Quicksands, in the true meaning of the term, are I believe, unknown in southern India, although conditions almost approaching them are to be found in some places. For instance, in the upper reaches of the Secret river, above the hamlet of Anchetty in the district of Salem, there is one particular spot where it is positively dangerous to cross at a time when the river is almost dry. I know this to my cost, for I once had tried to cross and had suddenly found myself waist-deep in the ooze. But for the help of two Forest Guards, I think I might have remained there for an indefinite period or even have been drawn under. Very vividly I can still remember how I struggled for all I was worth, but could not succeed by my own efforts in shifting either of my feet an inch out of that clinging slime.

For the elephant, now struggling madly before us, conditions were infinitely worse. His tremendous bulk and weight, coupled with his desperate exertions, made matters worse each moment. Slowly, little by little, he was being drawn down into the ooze before our very eyes. With his trunk he lashed the mud before him to right and left as he tried to find a way to lever himself out. He screamed in sheer terror, while his little eyes were dilated with horror as instinct told him he was doomed. And every moment, inch by inch, he sank lower and lower, while his screams, that had been filled with dread, now took on a piteous note of appeal.

Killer though he had been, his dreadful plight filled all three of us with acute distress. As if it had been yesterday, I remember my own feelings when I had sunk in the wet sand that day on the Secret river. To shoot him in this terrible plight, while struggling for his very life, appeared to be the act of a coward and murderer. A strange and powerful yearning came over me to try to succour him if possible.

But there was just nothing we could do. He was, after all, a wild elephant and to come within reach of that threshing trunk would be certain death. Even as we watched, the spectacle became more and more harrowing. The poor beast was now literally up to his neck in the liquid sand and his back was almost level with its surface. To make the scene even more dramatic, darkness was setting in apace. Escape for the poor animal was clearly impossible. Either he would soon be drawn under and suffocated, which was really the less evil fate, or if his feet found solid ground at the last moment, he could only remain stuck till he starved to death. I could not save him, but I could put an end to his sufferings. And I would have to do that at once, as it would soon be too dark to see.

There is a fatal shot which, if taken correctly, will drop even the largest elephant in his tracks, although it is one that is rarely achieved because of the obvious difficulty of getting the chance to take it: a

shot behind the ear, where the bullet will penetrate the brain from an angle unprotected by the enormously thick bones of the forehead. Kneeling down, I aimed carefully behind the left ear, waited for it to stop moving, held my breath, and gently squeezed the trigger.

The explosion had hardly died away when the elephant quivered as if in an ague. The trunk hit the mud with an inert flop, although the tip of it still searched questioningly, like some giant caterpillar groping for a leaf. I ran a few paces to the right, knelt again, and repeated the shot, this time behind the right ear.

A sigh of relief escaped all three of us. At least the poor beast could suffer no more. It was dead.

We came away from that dreadful place and groped our way back to Honathetti in darkness. But the Sholagas, whose village it was, led us there unerringly. Eventually we were back, and I told my American friend of our harrowing experience. But he, not having seen it himself, said he wished he had been there to take photographs, and that he would like to go to the spot the next morning to see if any could be taken.

Filled with a morbid curiosity as to whether those evil sands had finally claimed their victim or not, I accompanied him the next day. We reached the spot, but all we could see was a placid surface of undisturbed wet sand, glinting innocently in the rays of the early morning sun. The elephant had disappeared completely, and the soaking sands held their dark secret.

Five

Jungle Days and Nights

During the many years i have lived in these isolated places, off the beaten track, various little incidents have taken place, not themselves amounting to adventures, but milestones nevertheless on the long road of memory which often come back to me in my quieter moments. I would like to recount a few of them, some of them rather tragic, others humorous, and even one incident in which I behaved in a downright shameful way.

It took place many years ago, but the memory of that incident still haunts me to this day and I cannot live it down. It is said that making a confession of one's sins will relieve a troubled conscience. So I am going to do that now.

But every evil doer should be allowed to defend himself, and my defence lies in a prologue, an incident that took place earlier, the result of which was very strong in my memory and powerfully influenced me when the second incident occurred.

This first incident took place about twenty-five years ago. My friend, Deva Sundram, and I had gone out in my Ford to a place named Gummalapur, about twenty-eight miles south of Bangalore, for *khubbar* about panther. Do not let the word *khubbar* alarm you; it is just a simple Hindustani term for news or information.

Gummalapur lies in the Salem district of Madras state and is scarcely three miles beyond the Mysore state border. Two miles west of Gummalapur are many rugged, broken hills, covered with heavy scrub on their lower slopes and granite boulders and little caves at the top. In between these hills winds a narrow stream bearing the somewhat difficult name of Muthiyalamma Holay. It holds water only during the rainy season, is rocky in places, while at others it is full of marvellously soft sand. On both banks the jungle becomes dense and the trees lofty and verdant.

In the days when my father was a lad, and even when I was very young, this forest harboured tiger, elephant, bison and panther, in addition of course to all the normal game animals to be found in this part of the country. But after that the tigers and bison disappeared, shot out by the many hunters who came from nearby Bangalore. The elephants, protected by the government, are still there, but fewer, and are only to be seen during the monsoon months when they trek northwards from the Cauvery river. The panthers remain for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they are common wherever hills occur. Secondly,

there is abundant food for them in the many herds of domestic cattle that are driven into the jungle from Gummalapur to graze. Thirdly, people are not as keen to hunt panthers as they are to kill the larger varieties of game.

Deva Sundram and I had gone there to inquire from the local herdsmen whether they had recently lost many of their animals to panthers, and we had also come for a morning stroll in the scrub-jungle in the hope of picking up some feathered game, or a jungle-sheep or pig, to roast for dinner that night.

I forget now what information we got from the herdsmen, but we had crossed the river and walked up a slope in the scrub that soon brought us to the crest of a little hillock. From this eminence we looked across the carpet of jungle below us and scanned the wooded slopes of the higher hills.

Then we saw something, perhaps about a mile away and close to where the border of Mysore state fringes the jungle. Vultures were circling in the sky, many of them. Every now and then one would plane to earth, gliding with outstretched wings to disappear into a small valley in a fold of the hills. It was too far away to hear the rushing, rattling sound made by the wind as it beat against those outstretched pinions. There could be only one explanation. Something was lying dead in the valley. The vultures had located it and were hastening to the feast.

Could it be a panther's kill? Perhaps one of the many cattle that had been taken out to graze in the scrub, and as yet had not been missed by its owner.

With one accord, Dev and I made for the spot. It was not difficult to locate. The hissing, occasionally squawking horde of vultures, struggling and jostling each other on the ground, led us directly to the body. But a very big surprise was in store for us as the huge birds flapped away heavily and took to the air with difficulty. Certainly, a dead body lay there, but it was not the remains of a bull or a cow that had been killed by a panther. It was a human corpse, and as we approached we saw it was the body of a woman.

She had evidently been murdered and then tied to a bamboo pole by her hands and feet, lengths of jungle-vine being used for the purpose instead of the more conventional rope. Then she had been dumped in the jungle, close to the trunk of a large sandalwood tree. The vultures had evidently been feasting for some time, for they had torn chunks of flesh from the body. The eyes had been picked from their sockets, the nose was gone, and holes had been made through the skin of the cheeks and throat, laying bare the bones beneath. But most of the scalp remained, with the long black hair still adhering to it.

The corpse was naked, the birds having torn the thin saree and jacket to shreds. The entrails had been drawn out and devoured, laying bare a deep cavity in her abdomen, and a large part of the flesh of her arms, thighs and legs had also been eaten, so that the white bones could be seen. Had we arrived an hour or so later, we would have found nothing but the bones, picked clean. The vultures would have seen to that.

Dev and I bent over the body, trying to discover how the woman had died. But we gave up that task in a few minutes. The vultures had been at work too long and had effectively destroyed any trace of the manner in which she had been killed; that is, if the murderer or murderers had left any traces at all.

One thing was certain, however. Robbery had not been the motive. A pair of heavy silver anklets still encircled the ankle-bones where the flesh had been eaten away; a ring, which appeared to be of gold, was still on one of the fingers of the right hand; and earrings, undoubtedly of some value, were on the ears. Perhaps she had worn a nose ornament also. But that was gone now—along with the nose! She had a number of glass bangles, multi-coloured and of fancy design, on both arms right up to her elbows.

The smell of decay and putrefaction hung heavily on the still air and Dev, who was essentially an office man, unused to such sights and odours, was on the verge of retching. He clapped a handkerchief over his nose and mouth and backed away.

Our cursory examination proved of no value whatever. Obviously, after murdering the unfortunate woman, the culprits had brought the corpse to this remote spot at night rather than risk the trouble and danger involved in digging a grave and burying her. They knew quite well that within a few hours of daylight the vultures would completely obliterate all evidence of the crime. If a bone or two remained, the jackals and any hyena that passed that way the next night would complete the job. All had gone according to plan, except for the most unfortunate and unforeseen fact that that day, of all days, Dev and I had decided to take a walk in the jungle.

Now what were we going to do about it? Obviously, as public-minded people, report the matter to the police. With this in view, we set off on our walk back to Gummalapur. At the top of the first hillock I looked back to fix the location of the valley in my mind in case I should be required to find it again. That done, we hurried on. We reached the village only to find that the one and only policeman had fallen ill and been taken to hospital at the town of Hosur.

Now, as I have told you, this area lay in the district of Salem, belonging to Madras state. Hosur town was the immediate headquarters, but it was also considerably out of our way. Both Dev

and I were due back on duty at our respective jobs that afternoon. So we decided to inform the *patel* or headman of Gummalapur village of what we had found and where we had found it, return to Bangalore and send a written report to the Police Station at Hosur by post. As Bangalore itself is in Mysore state, such a report, if made to the police at Bangalore, would be returned with instructions to forward it to the Madras police.

So we told the *patel* and next morning posted a report from Bangalore. Two days later things began to happen in real earnest. A police van turned up at my house with three varieties of policemen in it, all wearing different uniforms. There were police from Hosur, in Madras state, with their tall red turbans. There were police from Bangalore Cantonment, at that time a British-administered sector under Central British government control, in blue and white turbans. And there were Mysore state police in blue turbans with red and yellow tabs.

Then began a perfect avalanche of questioning. Was I Mr Anderson? What was my full name, occupation and income? Where was Mr Deva Sundram? What was his full name, occupation and income? Why had we gone to Gummalapur? How had we found the dead woman? Was she a close friend or merely a casual acquaintance? Why should we have gone to that particular spot? Was the woman alive when we found her? Was she dead? How had she died? Was I sure that one or other of us did not know her before? What was her name? Where had she come from? Was she a young woman? Now came a very important question that I was to answer very carefully; did she bear gunshot wounds? Why did we not report the matter to the policeman at Gummalapur? Why had we failed to do our duty by not proceeding in person at once to Hosur to report the matter there? Where had we been all that day and the previous one? Were we in the habit of visiting Gummalapur frequently?

It took me some time to stop the tide of questions. I pointed out that, in our joint statement, Dev and I had clearly written down all the relevant facts. I went over those facts again.

The inexorable questioning continued. How had we known the woman was really dead? Might she not have been alive; perhaps in a faint? Had we taken steps to render first-aid? Why should the murderers (according to our version and if such ever existed) take the trouble to bind the body to a pole and carry it deep into the jungle? Would it not have been more easy to bury her?

I found myself becoming annoyed. I pointed out that I was not a detective and had made my report as a public-minded citizen. I told them it would have been very easy for us to have said nothing. It was all to no avail. Then came an order veiled in the form of a request.

Would I please lead them to Deva Sundram's residence, after which we would both have to proceed to the police station at Hosur.

Now I became really annoyed. I told the three varieties of policemen that I would certainly lead them to Deva Sundram's house, but after that I would not go to Hosur unless they cared to take me under arrest, for which they would require a warrant.

We compromised for the moment by going to Dev's house, where it started all over again. During these questions and answers we suddenly discovered, and with considerable surprise, that the Hosur police had not yet gone to the spot to locate the body. We suggested they do so without delay, giving them explicit directions.

There was some hesitation and much consultation between the three varieties of representatives of the law as to what should, or rather could, be done with both of us. The contingent from Hosur wanted very much to take us back with them, but the element from Bangalore Cantonment did not think it could be done without warrant. The Mysore state policemen remained neutral, ready to assist either way. At last the party drove off after warning both of us to hold ourselves available for further questioning.

Two days later they were back again. They had failed to find any corpse! Not even bones! Not even the bamboo pole to which we had said the body had been tied. Had there really been a body at all?

The result was that I said I would lead them to the place. Dev was busy and could not come. I went in the police van to Gummalapur. From there I set out with the party along the route Dev and I had returned that morning. We climbed the last hillock and I located the valley from it. Finally we reached the large sandalwood tree beneath which we had found the dead woman.

There was no body to be seen; no bones, not a shred of torn saree, and above all, no bamboo pole. Nothing! All the varieties of policemen glared at me with concentrated suspicion. Was this a joke? Was I trying to make monkeys out of them?

I approached the very spot on which the corpse had been lying and searched it closely. There I came across the half of a broken glass bangle and, in a little while, a few strands of long, raven-black hair — undoubtedly hair from a woman's head. I pointed these things out to the policemen in proof of the veracity of our report. I suggested that the murderers were in Gummalapur and had come to know of our discovery when Dev and I had been inquiring for the village policeman on our return that morning. Also they must have heard about our report to the *patel.* Obviously they had returned and removed the remains in order to baffle investigation.

The policemen's reaction to my theory was more unexpected than ever. They wanted to know how I had been able to find my way back

and lead them to the exact spot. They also wanted to know what had made me search so as to find the piece of the broken glass bangle and the strands of hair.

I took a deep breath upon hearing these questions and counted up to ten, very slowly. I then told them I would answer through my lawyer. But that made them more suspicious than ever. To cut a long story short, it took nearly three months of correspondence with higher officials, plus two visits to the police station at Hosur, before Dev and I ceased to be regarded as murderers. The solution found by the Madras Police was certainly a neat one. They said the murder must have been committed in Mysore state jurisdiction and the body then brought across the frontier and dumped in the Madras jungles. When it became known that the corpse had been discovered, the culprits had taken it back again.

The Mysore Police strongly rejected this view. Nobody had been murdered their side of the border, they said, adding that the Madras theory was an invention to cover the truth. Wherever the crime was committed and whoever did it, the fact remains that neither victim nor culprits were ever traced.

This was the second time I had suffered from officialdom through making a report of what I had found in the jungle. Once before I had come upon a dead elephant that was only half-grown. It had been shot behind the ear by a ball from a musket. The wound was clearly discernible. I had reported that find to the local Forest Department, accompanied by a photograph I had taken of the dead animal, showing the wound. I almost lost my game licence because of that report, because I was suspected of having shot the elephant myself, after which it was said I had made the report to cover up my own misdeed. That case also involved a lot of correspondence. I had to interview a very high official and tell him my story. I still feel he did not believe me. But as the local Forest Guards had placed dry wood upon the carcass of the dead elephant and burnt it because of the stench that spread for about a mile around the spot my guilt could not be proved. So I was graciously given the benefit of the doubt and allowed to retain my game or shooting licence, but under strong suspicion.

Having recounted these two incidents as a 'prologue', I will now go on to tell you about the main occurrence which took place about five years ago, and in which I feel I behaved so very discreditably. Four of us were returning from a visit to a planter friend named Alfie Morrison, the manager of a couple of large coffee estates on the Biligirirangan Mountains. There was the owner of the car we were travelling in; my son's friend, Rustam Dudhwala; another friend named Willie Wollen; my son, Donald, and myself. We had dinner

with Alfie Morrison followed by coffee and snacks and a little of his excellent whisky, after which we had been talking for some hours. It was long past midnight when we left his estate, and we had to cover over twenty miles of dense jungle before we reached a place named Punjur. It was a narrow, tortuous road, dropping steeply in places, with bamboo jungle on both sides, the haunt mainly of elephant, bison, and sambar, with an occasional tiger or lesser species of carnivore. Rustam was driving and I was next to him. The other two were behind.

We were about half-way to Punjur. The jungle was particularly dense and heavy. The time was 1.15 a.m. Suddenly, as Rustam turned a sharp bend in the road, we saw a human figure stretched across it, clearly visible in the bright light of the car. He braked hard to prevent running over the man, and we all got out to see what was the matter.

We found that the figure, lying in the middle of the road, was not that of a man at all but of a woman; in fact, of a girl who might have been about eighteen years of age. She was evidently poor, judging from the cheap quality of her red and black saree. Both her saree and her jacket were torn in many places and much of the former was covered with blood. This had not been visible in the lights of the car because, as I have told you, it was a black and red saree and neither colour will show up blood by artificial light at a distance. A closer examination showed the girl had been violently molested and raped. She was quite unconscious, probably from the effects of a blow or other injury. Her bare bosom moved only slightly as she breathed, and her pulse was very weak.

What should be done? The spontaneous reaction of all four of us was to carry her into the car, drive the remaining ten miles to Punjur and report the matter to the police there, and then take her to the hospital at the town of Chamrajnagar, a few miles away. But other thoughts began to filter through. Before us lay a young girl. She had been brutally raped. There were four of us in the car and we were all men! If we took the girl to the police station at Punjur, in that condition and with the circumstantial evidence, including the late hour of the night, the police would probably say the four of us had done the raping. They might even say we had knocked her down with the car and raped her afterwards. Of course, if the girl recovered consciousness, either at the police station at Punjur or at the hospital at Chamrajnagar, she would clear us of suspicion. But would she? What if her attackers had come upon her by surprise? What if she did not know them? Remember, we had no means of being certain where she had been set upon. It might have happened elsewhere and the culprits may have brought her in an unconscious condition in a bullock-cart and dumped her in the middle of the road. In the

confused state of mind she would be in when she recovered—if she recovered at all—she might genuinely think we had been responsible and accuse us. Finally, and worst of all, suppose she had been so seriously injured that she never recovered. We would be in a terrible plight with charges of rape and murder against us. We would be in a court case that might drag on for years. We might be jailed. We might even be hanged.

We argued the situation there, in the middle of the road, for nearly an hour, hoping the girl might show signs of returning consciousness, when we would have spoken to her, found out what happened and then taken her into the car. But she never regained consciousness. On the contrary, her breathing became slower and her pulse almost imperceptible.

It was a difficult decision to take, to desert a human being, obviously in dire need and at the point of death, in the middle of an elephant-infested jungle, at dead of night, miles from anywhere and without aid. On the other hand, I remembered the incident of the dead elephant and the murdered woman near Gummalapur. I had been accused on both occasions. Now the evidence against us, although circumstantial, was certainly much greater and almost conclusive. The only defence we could offer was that, had we been guilty, we would have left the girl and not brought her to safety. But even that action could be interpreted as a cunning move to cover our guilt. As the oldest member of the party, I knew I could have persuaded the others to run the risk of what might happen and take the girl in the car to Punjur and then to the hospital at Chamrajnagar. But I did not. Instead, I agreed with them to leave the poor girl where she lay and to continue on our way.

Of course, we never heard what befell that unfortunate young woman. But the action of deserting her and leaving her to her fate is one that fills me with guilt till this very day.

I will now change the mood of these reminiscences by telling you two short stories against myself, stories that show what effect the appearance of a tiger has on the nerves of a tyro.

The first incident took place when I was fifteen years old. My father had taken me to a place named Lingadhalli, in the Kadur district of Mysore state, on a duck and snipe-shooting trip. Dad was never a big game *wallah* , although it was he who taught me how to use a gun at a very early age. He was an excellent snipe shot, at which I am a complete failure even to this day, and was fond of duck-shooting particularly and also other small game.

There are two or three tanks near Lingadhalli which, around Christmas time, hold quite a number of wild-duck and teal, with occasional geese. There are also reserved forests surrounding it which

hold tiger and panther. Our armament consisted of Dad's favourite .16 bore double-barrelled shotgun, and an old hammer .12 bore double-barrelled shotgun which he had given me for my birthday that year.

It was reported to me on the afternoon of the second day that a tiger had killed a bull in an areca-nut plantation adjacent to the tank where we had gone to shoot duck that very morning. The owner told me about it, but I kept the matter a secret from Dad. I knew he would not allow me to go after a tiger. My knowledge of big game shooting at that time was practically nil, but when the owner offered to tie a *machan* for me if I made an attempt to shoot the tiger that had killed his bull, I resolved to do or die in the attempt and told him to go ahead.

I told Dad a lie that evening, saying I was going out with a villager to shoot 'flying fox', which is the name given to the large Indian fruit-bat, and said that I would return about eleven o'clock. I fondly imagined I would bring the dead tiger back with me. Leaving Dad in the little Travellers' Bungalow on the plea that I wanted to try my luck at shooting peafowl and hare (rabbits) before going on for the flying fox, I started out a little before 5 p.m. In less than an hour I was alone in the *machan* in the midst of the tall, swaying areca-nut trees, with the dead bull stretched on the ground beneath me.

To this day I can remember that *machan.* It could not have been much more than twelve feet above the ground; a rough, scraggy, unprotected affair. Certainly the kind of *machan* a tiger would easily detect and therefore not visit or come anywhere near. But we have all heard of beginner s luck', and it was with me on that memorable evening.

It was dusk when the tiger came, and almost the first thing he did was to look up and see me sitting on that very obvious platform. He snarled and stopped in his stride. I was petrified with terror. Not a muscle would move or obey my command. I wanted to scream aloud in fear. But even that I could not do. The tiger took off with a grunt of alarm and anger as the .12 slipped from my nerveless fingers and rolled off the platform to fall with a thud on the ground beneath. Fortunately the soil was wet and soft, and the gun fell stock-first, so that nothing happened to it. But I was thoroughly disgruntled and hated myself for being an arrant coward, nor did I tell Dad anything about it when I got back to the travellers' bungalow before 8 p.m. that night.

Mortified at what had happened, it was not long afterwards that I went on a hunting trip with another boy, slightly older than myself, named Jerry Barrow. We went to a village a few miles away from the town of Sagar in the Shimoga district of Mysore state. Once again our luck, as novices, was excellent, for within a day of our arrival two

tiger kills were reported at two separate spots in the jungle, both scarcely a mile from the village. We tossed a coin and I remember I got the kill to the west of the village. There a fine full-grown cow had been destroyed and partly eaten in the bed of a *nullah* or stream. As fortune would have it, a sapling grew nearby, and, remembering what had happened at Lingadhalli when I had sat on a *machan* twelve feet up, I saw to it that the platform was tied at a crotch in the tree at least eighteen feet above the kill on the bed of the *nullah.* The sapling grew straight up from the bed of the stream and at a right angle to the bank of the *nullah,* which itself at this spot was steep and at least a dozen feet higher than the sandy bed.

I took up my position early and was intently, nervously watchful. All tyros do that. Eventually it began to grow dark, and along with dusk came two tigers—or rather, a tiger and a tigress—walking one behind the other. The only trouble was that they were walking along the high bank of the *nullah,* whereas my present *machan* was about eighteen feet above that same bed. And so it came about that I found myself only six feet above the tiger and his mate. I had sought to improve conditions, but had inadvertently worsened them. At least at Lingadhalli I had been a dozen feet above the first tiger I had ever seen in a wild state. Now I was looking at two of them, and at half that distance! However, I had made some progress by this time, at least so far as my nervous reactions were concerned. I did not let the gun drop out of the *machan* , although sheer blue funk restrained me from attempting a shot.

By a strange coincidence almost the same experience befell a friend of mine, at a place very close by, but many years later. And he, too, behaved like me—and he too was a beginner.

Often, in the course of conversation with other hunters, I hear disparaging remarks about the actions of some novice or greenhorn: of how he would not shoot because he could not shoot, or missed badly because he was trembling like an aspen. Then I confide to my hearers my own reactions on two occasions, in sympathy with those unknown tyros and novices. I can assure you that the mere sight of the king of the jungle in his wild state and in all his majesty, at close range and in darkness, is something awe-inspiring. It is a very different spectacle from the docile, half-starved tigers one sees in zoos and circuses.

Some of our trips have resulted in little incidents with an element of comedy in them; others, which might have ended rather more seriously, turned out rather funny.

I have been out with all sorts of people. Some have been morose companions, grumbling and complaining at the least inconvenience. Others have been extremely exacting, such as those who insist on eating only home-prepared and cooked food, drinking only boiled

water or soda-water, tea and coffee, or sleeping on camp cots under mosquito nets. A third variety, although rare, are of the other extreme; they are so enthusiastic that they want to be on the move right throughout the twenty-four hours. In rain or sunshine, with little or no food at all, and no rest.

That is why, on all serious *shikar* trips, I prefer to be on my own. I have accustomed myself to sleeping anywhere, even in the open under a tree, and to eating anything that may be available, from cooked European or Indian food to an aboriginal diet of berries, roots and even half-cooked meat. As for water, I have had to dig holes in sandy riverbeds, wait till water collects in them, and then lie prone and suck it from the hole I have dug, holding a corner of a handkerchief across my mouth to strain out the finer grains of sand and sometimes the green slime in the water itself.

On one occasion a friend of mine, a major, and two other friends, a doctor and his son, had planned a three-week tiger shoot in a very remote corner of the jungles of Shimoga district in Mysore state. There was a tiny forest bungalow far from any motorable road, and a small village nearby. We had taken along a huge store of provisions, but as three weeks is a long time and we were all permanently hungry and eating heartily, together with the fact that feathered game was not too plentiful and we did not want to alarm the tigers in the vicinity with indiscriminate shooting, our food-stock began to run out soon after ten days. Half rations for everyone was the result.

One night, during the period of scarcity, I heard peculiar sounds coming from the part of the bungalow we had been using as a dining-room. I could just detect a faint rattling and scraping noise. I reached for my electric torch, tiptoed to the door leading to the dining-room, and switched on. There was the doctor's son, stealing food. He had buttered a slice of bread, spread condensed milk over it, and finally sprinkled that with sugar.

I then did an unsporting thing. I 'sneaked'. Feigning alarm, I yelled loudly: 'Doctor, Doctor; there is a thief in the dining-room.'

Out came the doctor, to catch his son red-handed. The lecture that was given the lad was so loud and so long that it kept me from falling asleep for another hour.

Food became scarcer than ever at that camp, but we were loath to abandon it as the tigers had just begun to kill the live baits we had been tying out for them, although we had not had the luck so far to shoot one. It was decided that we should go to the villagers and offer to buy any kind of food from them at any price. The son went first, and returned with one egg. The next day the doctor tried his luck. He came back in a very bad temper. The villagers had told him that the previous day they had sold the young *sahib* seven eggs. The boy had

brought back just one. Confronted by his father he confessed he had been very hungry and had eaten the other six eggs, raw, on his way back. The villagers had also told the doctor they had no spare food to sell, for it was scarce and they needed it for themselves.

On the third day, I went. The villagers told me the same thing. They had no chickens to sell and no *ragi* grain either. Everything was required for their own consumption. When the major's turn came to go begging, he decided to do something novel. He invited the whole village to come to the nearby forest bungalow that afternoon to witness a very grand entertainment including dances, such as they had never seen before, performed entirely by himself. It would be a free show, he told them; but a collection would be taken at the end—of food, in any shape or form.

That afternoon a few ancient yokels trickled in and a few young ones. These spectators proceeded to squat on the floor of the verandah. It was an hour before some thirty persons had collected. When he judged that that was about all the audience he would gather, the major went inside and came back with a towel tied around his waist. Then, humming through compressed lips in a very fair imitation of a bagpipe, he executed the highland fling and some reels. Finally, laying two crossed rifles on the floor, he did the sword dance.

I am not sure how much the audience appreciated the show, but for all his efforts not one of them had brought any foodstuff, and the bag Robbie took around for the collection was as empty after his strenuous efforts as it had been before.

Another little incident of another sort happened at Yemmaydoddi, in the Kadur district. Don and I, with a young friend of his, Sonny, had gone there for a few days to show Sonny a tiger, which he was going to shoot. He awoke at 3 a.m. on the first morning of the trip, and I heard him trying to awaken Don and arouse enough interest in him to go for a torch-shining walk in the jungle. It was bitterly cold, and to make matters worse there was a slight drizzle. Don preferred his warm bed, and in no uncertain terms he told Sonny this. I felt sorry for the boy, so in a fit of self-sacrifice I said I would accompany him.

We set forth, Sonny carrying my .405 rifle, which he had borrowed, while I swung the beam of a five-cell torch from side to side in the hopes of picking up the eyes of a tiger. Quite soon we reached a narrow track which runs parallel to a water-channel coming from a big lake, known as the Maddak Tank, about four miles away, and started to walk towards this lake. Fortunately it had stopped drizzling, but it was colder than ever, and pitch-dark.

About halfway to the lake I caught sight of twin spots of light, coming from somewhere in the jungle on the other side of the

intervening water-channel. They were fiery red. What animal was this? The eyes were so very red. I used my torch-beam to make the creature move or turn its head to reveal its identity. The twin red lights never as much as flickered. For a moment I swung the torch-beam off them, so as to allow the animal to see us and move, but the red lights glowed on. That solved the problem. They were not the eyes of an animal at all, but the embers of a fire. Some jungle-folk were camped there.

It is a popular, but entirely false notion, that the eyes of wild animals glow in the dark with their own luminosity. They do not. It is only when a bright light is directed on them that the inner surface of their eyes, through the open pupils, reflect the light and the eyes 'shine' with different colours, green, whitish-green, whitish-red, or reddish-white, according to which animal is there, and according to the angle of the light. But the eyes do not shine of their own accord. Therefore, if there is no torch-light no reflecting 'shine' can come from any animal's eyes. Conversely, if there is a 'shine' when there is no torch-light, it cannot come from the eyes of any animal.

As I have said, the solution was simple. We were confronted by the embers of a fire and not by a wild beast. Sonny was standing beside me when I said, carelessly and casually, 'Fire'. The next moment there was a violent explosion, as he fired my rifle. Luckily he missed hopelessly.

There were wild cries of alarm from the rudely-awakened sleepers. 'Aiyo! Aiyo!' they yelled in consternation.

'What the hell are you doing, you fool?' I shouted at Sonny. 'I told you it was a fire.'

'You did nothing of the sort,' he replied. 'You just said "Fire" and I fired.'

Incidentally, this little incident shows with what apparent contempt jungle-folk regard tigers that are not man-eaters. These men were sleeping out in the open, quite unprotected, in an area well-known to harbour tigers.

This fellow Sonny was a dangerous sort of person to go out with. One of those regular Jonahs, if you know what I mean. Once we were driving through a particular belt of scrub jungle near Tarikere, trying to shoot a wild pig for the 'pot', as meat was running low at our camp at Yemmaydoddi. It had rained heavily that afternoon, and as the area was noted for pigs, we were almost certain of coming across one at any moment. It was about 10 p.m. Sonny was seated on the left-hand mudguard of my car with an old .12 gauge shotgun he had borrowed. A friend named Basil Jones was sitting up on the back with another shotgun. Don was next to me, while I was driving. We did not have a spotlight, as that was against the rules, but it was conceded that if a

pig ran across the road in the glare of the headlights it could legitimately be shot at.

Suddenly, a boar dashed across the road a few yards in front of the car, brightly lit by the headlights. But Sonny did not see it. He must have been dreaming. We all yelled, 'Shoot', but the pig by that time had gone. We called Sonny all kinds of names and told him to be ready for the next one.

A mile or so later another pig ran across the road. Sonny saw this one all right but was too slow to fire. Basil Jones stood up in the dickie-seat and fired over our heads. Perhaps because of the lurching of the car he aimed short. There followed a sharp crack and the metal aeroplane that decorated the radiator-cap of the Studebaker disintegrated under a shower of pellets.

Just then Sonny began making frantic gesticulations for me to stop. I thought that perhaps Basil had hit the pig and

Sonny had seen it fall. So I braked sharply. Sonny jumped off his seat on the mudguard, ran around the front of the car, and came towards me holding his .12 bore at arm's length.

'Here, take this damned gun,' he said in disgust. 'Something is wrong with it. Before I could press the trigger it went off and smashed your radiator cap to pieces.'

'Let me have a look at it,' I suggested. I took the weapon from him and opened the breach. There were cartridges in both chambers and neither of them had been fired. The explosion of Basil's gun, together with the noise made by the disintegrating radiator-cap, had made Sonny think that it was his weapon that had gone off.

The third incident in which this youngster figured was the funniest of the lot, although it might very easily have ended in a tragedy. This time we were conducting a morning beat for pig in scrub jungle at Bannerghatta, about fifteen miles south of Bangalore. There was an interlude in the beat. Sonny was standing on the bed of a small dry ravine. Another fellow, named Arthur Stanley, was standing at the top of its bank, perhaps ten feet above Sonny and as many feet away. They were talking, and to emphasize some point, Sonny banged the butt of the same .12 bore shotgun, which he had once again borrowed, on the ground. There was a crash as the gun went off, leaping out of Sonny's hand with the force of the recoil, while Arthur Stanley's sun helmet sailed away, its brim shot off at the front by pellets from Sonny's gun.

Arthur promptly fainted with shock. We rallied around and revived him, while we cursed Sonny for a congenital and prodigious idiot. He remained rooted to the bed of the ravine looking at all of us in surprise and wondering what it was all about. Arthur soon recovered from his faint and was still standing at the edge of the

ravine, almost at the same spot as when the gun had gone off.

'How could it have happened?' Sonny was asking. 'I had only loaded one cartridge in the right barrel and was gently tapping the butt on the ground when, for no reason at all, the gun just went off.'

And having uttered these words, Sonny began to demonstrate how he had been gently tapping the butt of the gun on the ground when suddenly, unexpectedly, his gun went off a second time. Arthur fell back in another faint as the shot swished past his head.

'I thought you said you had loaded only one cartridge in your gun?' Don asked, in a highly sarcastic tone.

'That's true,' Sonny replied. 'Have a look for yourself.'

With these words he opened the breach of his shotgun. Then his eyes grew wide in amazement. There were two shells in the breach, one in each barrel. And they had both been fired.

We had an amusing experience once in a Model A Ford belonging to Rustam Dudhwala. It happened about thirty miles from Kollegal, in Coimbatore district, in the middle of the afternoon. The nut anchoring the fan worked loose and without warning the fan cut a neat, circular hole in the radiator from which every drop of water soon leaked out. We were in the middle of the jungle and it was evident we would somehow have to get the car back to Kollegal for repairs.

Rustam then had what he called a brain wave. Removing the bonnet completely, he loosened the metal clamps that held the hose-pipe connecting the radiator to the cylinder head. Then he cut one of the spare inner tubes he was carrying right across near the air-inlet nozzle and fitted one of the open ends of the tube on to the metal neck protruding from the cylinder-head, folding the excess rubber around it and fixing the tube to the neck firmly with the metal hose-clamp he had loosened. Down the neck of the hollow tube he poured water from the two-gallon tin he had at the back of the car, tilll the cylinder-heads and half the rubber tube were full. A friend named Willie Wollen was commissioned to sit on the mudguard and hold the free end of the half-filled inner tube in his two hands, while Rustam turned the car around and headed back to Kollegal.

Soon things began to happen. The water grew hot and began to steam. The tube started to swell alarmingly and seemed in momentary danger of bursting. In order to release the pressure and allow some of the steam to escape, Willie loosened his grip at the end of the tube. But he had forgotten that the water-pump was working. Out came not only steam but scalding hot water, all over his hands. With an oath he dropped the whole contraption and away went all the water again. We had a good laugh at his discomfiture, but ceased laughing when he flatly refused to hold the tube any longer. Anyhow, we poured some water down the tube and took turns at holding it while Rustam drove

a few miles at a time, stopping occasionally to allow the water to cool. Meanwhile we refilled the two-gallon petrol tin at every stream, tank or well we passed. And so we reached Kollegal at last.

I well remember a certain gentleman I took out with me. He was a bit of a crank. He had read somewhere that condensed milk was rich in food value and provided all necessary vitamins; so he said he would bring no other form of food with him but tins of condensed milk on which he proposed to live for the whole week we remained out. His theories of food value might have been all very well, but he ran into difficulties on the fifth day. Condensed milk itself is constipating. Further, his system was dehydrated by the heat (it was midsummer) and the salt he had lost in perspiration. That evening he suddenly collapsed, saying he was feeling very ill. His temperature shot up and severe stomach cramps set in. But try as he would, he could not relieve himself. The situation became very serious. It was then we thought of using what materials were available. The rubber lead of the foot-pump belonging to the car with the metal connections at each end cut off, and the bulb of the horn filled with lukewarm water and then pressed on to one end of the rubber lead, served as an effective enema. The procedure of refilling the bulb and then emptying it by pressing had to be repeated twice or thrice, but it achieved the required result, thus perhaps saving the man's life. A spoonful of engine oil, grade 40, administered orally, also helped.

I used this treatment once again, years later, at a place named Gerhetti in Salem district, when a rather elderly gentleman named Sells who had come out with me to photograph elephants, suddenly collapsed with sunstroke. We had been out all day in the blazing sun, and when we got back to the forest bungalow at dusk he complained of a very severe headache and giddiness. Soon high fever set in with violent vomiting, and he became unconscious. Treatment with the pump-nozzle of the car, together with hourly cold-water sponge baths, lowered his temperature, and by next morning he was on his feet again.

I had an interesting experience myself when I went out into the jungle several years ago, for a whole week, with my friend Byra the poojaree, an aborigine I had met in the forests of the Salem district in Madras state under rather unusual circumstances.* For the fun of it I had determined to carry no gun nor take any food. I wanted to live on the jungle for these seven days, and on such things as Byra himself could procure from the forest by the primitive means at his disposal. I had stipulated that Byra himself should not bring his much-prized, but unlicensed, matchlock.

The outstanding thing about this excursion was that I seemed to be always ravenously hungry, every hour and day of the whole period.

I am sure Byra found his hands full in having to feed me and himself. As it was, I ate about thrice what he consumed. We swallowed various berries and the yam-like roots of different creepers he dug up; we devoured the combs of wild bees; we ate the small mud-crabs that lived by a pool near the Chinar River; we chewed snails and locusts; we ate the large, long, fat queen-ant from a termite hill that we dug up together. Byra caught two oodumbus (a species of lizard over a yard long, properly called the iguana), which we cooked and devoured; I found it very tasty and very tender.

Yet I was still hungry. With the aid of an ingenious trap, having a noose of plaited horse-hair, Byra caught a jungle-cock. After wringing its neck, he proceeded to make what is known as a 'mud-roast'. I give the procedure, which is really quite simple in case some venturesome boy scout or other person would like to try it out for himself.

There are two ways of preparing a roast without utensils. Of course, whichever way you use it you must first remove the feathers of the bird or the outer skin of the animal which you wish to roast and also its entrails. Thereafter, you can do a 'stick-roast' or a 'mud-roast' as you prefer. A stick-roast is done by driving a long sharpened stick right through the bird or beast. Then two Y-shaped sticks are cut and their ends planted in the ground at such a distance from each other that the ends of the stick which skewers the meat rest on the Y-shaped supports. The stick and its burden can then be rotated. A gentle fire of embers is made beneath, and the skewer-stick slowly rotated by hand to keep the meat from being burnt. No leaves should be used in the fire, as they will only blacken and smoke the flesh.

This method has several drawbacks. Firstly, it requires constant attention. Secondly, the skewer has to be turned all the time. Thirdly, however careful one may be, the finished roast always turns out dry and partly-burnt, while the inner parts are almost raw. The one advantage is that it can be prepared anywhere in the jungle at short notice.

For a 'mud-roast' the bird or animal is similarly prepared. Then a layer of mud, either from the edge of a stream or pond, or made with the aid of earth and water, is plastered all over the carcass till it is a little over an inch thick. The result is a sort of mud ball encasing the flesh completely. A fire of embers is next prepared and the mud ball placed in it. Then the ball is covered with more embers till it is completely hidden from view except at the top, where the mud should be partly visible. The moderate heat is maintained till cracks are seen in the mud. Another ten minutes is allowed after that, then the mud ball is removed from the fire, taking care it does not disintegrate while doing so. Alternatively, the embers around and beneath the mud ball may be removed, leaving just the ball. Allow this to cool a little and

then, with the aid of another stick, break off the covering. The resulting roast will be found very tasty and not too dry, and the meat will be cooked right through.

The disadvantage of this method is, of course, the finding or making of mud of a suitable consistency to cover the flesh entirely. If it has too much large-grained sand, the covering will disintegrate with the heat before the flesh inside has been properly roasted, which will then be burnt. If the mud is too watery it will not adhere to the flesh. But if the mud is of the right composition and holds together, the meat is excellently cooked in its own juices. It is a very successful method provided the game is the size of a fowl or a rabbit, but it cannot be employed for larger game, as the covering of mud will not remain intact in such cases.

Companions who come out into the jungle insisting on drinking only boiled water for fear of germs and dysentery, and in sleeping under mosquito nets because of malaria, prove a nuisance. In my very humble opinion they kill themselves over and over again by imagining the presence of microbes of all varieties. Most important of all, they are not 'mobile'. In a jungle, particularly as far as serious shooting is concerned, it is essential to be able to move anywhere and to move fast, and this means eating whatever is available and drinking and sleeping wherever and whenever one can. A party of hunters impeded with a load of canned provisions and utensils for boiling water, plus mosquito nets and camp cots and regular tentage, becomes cumbersome. Coolies or bearers are required to carry all this paraphernalia. That means more mouths to feed.

I remember that I once took a husband, wife and grown son fishing on the banks of the Cauvery river. I had gone with them in their car. When night fell—a beautiful moonlight night—I made my bed on the river's sandy bank. The cool breezes wafting down the river were refreshing and lulled me to sleep. But my clients woke me up, wanting to know if there was any danger from crocodiles and wild animals. Sleepily, I replied in the negative and dozed off again. But I was disturbed in a few minutes by the noise they were making. These people had brought mosquito nets and poles and were planting the latter in the sand. Cross pieces were tied to the framework, then a snow-white curtain was brought out and tied to the poles at the four corners. Eventually the three of them lay down beneath it to sleep.

But instead of sleeping, every little while the older man would sit up, lift up the mosquito net and shine his torch round and round. I turned on my side with my back to them and once again fell asleep. But not for long. For I was startled by a scream from the lady, followed by much bustling. I rolled over to see the family trio tangled up in their own mosquito curtain, which had collapsed, poles and all,

on top of them. The lady was shouting, 'Scorpion! Scorpion!', and the wavering light of the torch was directed upon the river sand a few yards away.

Getting to my feet, I inquired, rather impatiently, as to the cause of the commotion. The lady said that in the light of the torch she was sure she had seen a large scorpion crawling across the sand a few feet away. Taking the torch from her husband, I walked to the spot she indicated. There was no scorpion there that I could find, but she affirmed very definitely that there had been one a few moments before. She may have been right, although I doubt it. However, the scorpion, if there had been one, had disappeared. I searched awhile, but finding nothing I suggested we all might try seriously to snatch a few hours sleep.

But no, they would have none of that. The three of them stoutly asserted that they preferred to spend the rest of the night sitting in their car. Then they did an amazing thing. They draped their mosquito net completely over their car, and, getting under the net, opened the doors and got into the vehicle. This way, they said, they would not be bitten by mosquitoes. Fair enough, I thought; now I will be able to get some sleep. But I was quite wrong. From inside the car, through the windows and the net, they kept shining that infernal torch around and around, and on to me. To make matters worse, after a while they started tooting the electric horn.

'What on earth are you doing?' I inquired testily.

'We hear noises in the jungle,' one of them answered. 'There are wild animals about. You are asleep and so cannot hear, but we can.'

With all that commotion, plus the torchlight and the electric horn, I knew no animal would approach within half a mile. But it was not worthwhile to mention the fact. At about 4 a.m. their nerves gave out completely.

'Wake up,' the man called to me, 'and let us get away from this fearful place. It is dangerous for us to remain here.'

Once again I said nothing, but arose docilely and got into the car. Always, when the time comes to leave the jungle and return to civilization, I do so with regret. This time it was different. I was more than fed up and felt relieved when the engine started and we began the return trip to Bangalore.

On another occasion, a very senior officer in a factory where I was once employed asked me if I would take him out to shoot a really large crocodile, as he badly wanted the skin. I agreed, and we left in his car that very night for Hogenaikal, on the Cauvery river, where these reptiles are to be found in reasonable numbers. There were four of us in the party. The officer, his lady friend, my son Donald, and myself.

At about nine the next morning when the sun was becoming really hot we hired a coracle, camouflaged the sides of it with twigs, and started floating gently downstream on the lookout for crocodiles basking on the sandbanks bordering the river. I told the great man that when we saw one, he would have to make a landing ashore, detour into the jungle and stalk the reptile soundlessly till he was close enough to take a neck shot. To approach it directly in the coracle would be to lose it, as crocodiles are very cunning and slide back into the water as soon as danger approaches. Shooting a crocodile in the neck paralyses the spinal column and prevents the reptile from making that last-minute convulsive twist of the body whereby it plunges back into the water, not to be seen again. Either the currents will take the carcase miles downstream or the crocodile will wedge itself between rocks at the bottom of the river and perish there.

But the great man contradicted me sharply. He said that he had read in a book that a heart shot, immediately behind the left foreleg, was the most effective. I tried to point out that there was no doubt that such a heart shot would kill the crocodile, but not before it plunged back into the river and was lost. But he would have none of this.

In due course we spotted a large crocodile sunning itself on a sand bank, and we set our man ashore out of sight and a quarter of a mile upstream. Then I sat in the coracle and watched the scene through my binoculars. For a man of his bulk, he did a marvellous piece of stalking. The bank on which the crocodile was lying rose to some height, and after quite a long time I saw the stalker appear at the top of the bank, lie down and aim carefully. Suddenly the crocodile seemed to rear up on its own tail and then plunge into the water with a great splash. The next second came the sharp report of the rifle.

I ordered the owner of the coracle to paddle quickly to the spot. There my client met me with a wide smile, his face deep red from the heat and his exertions. 'I got him,' he said, 'right behind the left shoulder.'

'I am afraid you haven't,' I answered. 'No doubt you hit him and he will die. But we will never find him.'

'Rot!' he replied brusquely. 'Get some fishermen to throw their nets into the river and we will soon pick him up.'

The coracle was despatched to bring fishermen from the village of Ootaimalai with their nets. These came after an hour and the nets were duly cast. But no dead crocodile was picked up. The river was too deep and the nets did not reach the bottom. Besides, there were the currents to be reckoned with.

'Let us try for another,' I suggested consolingly.

'You don't know me,' said the great man. 'I will never give in till I succeed.'

The nets were cast till evening, but we caught no dead crocodile. At dinner that night I suggested that, as we were due back at work the next day, we should leave at about ten.

'You do not know me,' I was told. 'I will never give in till I succeed. I am not leaving this place till I recover my crocodile.'

Next morning I again suggested we look for another crocodile. My man glared at me disdainfully. The net-casting was begun again, but by lunch-time no carcase had been found. The great man was perspiring copiously and swearing loudly when we sat down for lunch at the table in the forest bungalow. He took off his bush-coat and threw it over a chair, sitting down bare to the waist. Seeing the great personage make himself comfortable, Donald did likewise, removing his shirt before he sat down, also bare to the waist.

Suddenly the great man asked: 'Anderson, how many men work directly under you at the plant?' Wondering at the suddenness of the question, I answered automatically, 'About 110.'

Much to my surprise and dismay, he rejoined acidly: 'It indeed astonishes me how you control them when you cannot control your own son.'

Seeing the bewilderment in my expression, he went on in icy tones: 'You allow your son to sit at lunch-table bare-bodied, with a lady present!'

Before I could answer, Donald cut in. 'What about yourself? Aren't you also bare-bodied? You should set an example instead of doing yourself what you don't want others to do.'

The man's face changed to deep red, then almost purple with anger. 'Damn it man, do you allow this pup to speak to me, your superior officer, in this way?' Then, turning to Don, he added furiously: 'Shut up before I make you.'

That was rather too much for Donald. He was young and very vigorous. 'You old so-and-so,' he answered. 'My dad may be working under you, but I am not. Come outside and I'll feed you to your blasted crocodile.'

I do not know how it was that the great man avoided an attack of apoplexy. Perhaps his friend saved the situation by suggesting we return to Bangalore forthwith, which we did. This man remained my boss for over two years after that, but he never spoke to me again. Don and I still laugh when we think of this incident and wonder how great men can ever be so silly.

Now let me tell you about my friend, Freddie Galiffe, and the wild elephant—half-rogue and certainly a killer—that lived in a corner of his vast estate, and for which Freddie had a soft spot,

because the presence of this old monster and his nocturnal ramblings largely discouraged the activities of timber thieves who would now and again raid the more distant parts of his estate for the valuable timber and bamboos that grew there.

Freddie Galiffe owns quite a large estate, somewhere around 600 acres of land about half of which is virgin forest, just within Mysore state and its border with Coorg, which was till very recently a little independent state lying to the west of the larger jurisdiction of Mysore. The ranges of the Western Ghats begin here and the country is wild, rugged and densely wooded. It is inexpressibly beautiful. Large areas are covered entirely with bamboo jungle, and the stems of the bamboos attain really magnificent heights and are extraordinarily stout, sometimes as thick as your thigh.

To the west of Freddie's estate lies a vast area of bamboo jungle called Annay Chowk, meaning 'elephant residence', which is government Reserve Forest and has for long borne an evil reputation for elephants and been the birthplace of many rogues for as long as anyone can remember.

'Freddie's Rogue', as I have called this particular elephant, evidently came from Annay Chowk, but for some unknown reason it migrated to Freddie's estate and lived almost permanently in a corner of his land to the west, where heavy jungle and tender bamboos, the favourite food of elephants, prevail. From the description my friend who has seen this elephant many times has given me, the rogue is a very old animal, for the uppermost ends of his ears turn over. Apparently he is over nine feet in height, which is quite big for an Indian elephant.

Not far from the little shack in which Freddie lives is a natural lake, known in India as a 'tank'. Freddie has taken advantage of this tank to build a 'bund', or ridge, on one side, and through a sluice gate he draws water for cultivating several paddy fields where he grows very good quality rice.

Robbers came one moonlit night to rob his paddy. They arrived in a bullock-cart in which they intended to load and carry away the paddy. And they did just that. They stole his paddy, loaded the cart, and drove it away. But by bad luck they met 'Freddie's Rogue' a mile away. He killed one of the thieves, demolished the cart and, strange as it may seem, did not touch the paddy.

On another occasion timber thieves felled a teak tree growing on Freddie's land, lopped off the branches and carried away the straight trunk. There must have been six or eight of them, for the trunk was heavy. Once again 'Freddie's Rogue' appeared around the corner. He squashed one of them flat. Another he playfully tossed away so that the thief's thigh was broken when he hit the ground. The next

morning it was his calls for help that brought Freddie and his men to the spot. There they found the heavy teak log, the crushed thief and his injured comrade.

There was a third robbery. This time one of Freddie's sturdy bulls, which he kept for drawing the plough, was the victim. It had been stabled with others behind Freddie's shack; the thieves untethered him at dead of night and led him away. But not very far. Perhaps they had gone half a mile when, like avenging justice, 'Freddie's Rogue' appeared. He chased one of the thieves who, to save his life, came to Freddie's hut for safety, banging frantically upon his door. He gave himself up after confessing his crime.

One day an adventurous couple, who were friends of Freddie's, came to his estate. They said they had decided to live in the wilds for a year and asked Freddie's permission to build a cabin for themselves in some remote part of his estate. It was a strange request, but having nothing to lose by granting it, Freddie good-naturedly consented. But he warned them about the rogue elephant, but nothing daunted, they set about constructing a shack, Tarzan-fashion, among the boughs of a banyan tree and just about twenty feet off the ground. It was really lucky for them that they chose this height.

During the two months or so that it took to construct their hut of split bamboos and leaves, and a ladder for vines by which they could climb up and down to their strange home, they shared Freddie's humble hut. Then at last came the house-warming occasion. The home-in-the-tree was ready. Freddie climbed up into it and pronounced it excellent. That night the adventurous couple spent their first night in their love nest on the banyan tree.

At some time during the dark hours they were awakened by strange noises from below. They peeped down from their front door to see a huge elephant standing on the ground beneath, his extended trunk waving in the air a few feet below them. Fortunately they made no sound whatever, while the pachyderm was not angry but only mildly curious. Without doubt he scented them but failed to discover exactly where they were. He remained below for over an hour, sniffing with outstretched trunk. Had he thought of raising himself on his hind legs, circus fashion, he could have reached them with the end of his trunk and brought their flimsy home crashing to earth. Providentially he did not do so. There is no doubt that by remaining quiet the couple saved their lives, for eventually the elephant lost interest in the structure and wandered off. With daylight they descended, nor did they spend another night in the little tree-hut they had so painstakingly built.

Freddie professes to have a fondness for 'his rogue', as he calls this elephant, and he consistently refuses to send a report to the

authorities about him, or to try to shoot the elephant himself on his own land—which is permissible. Freddie claims the pachyderm is an unpaid watchman. It is significant that the thieves now leave Freddie's lands alone at night. It is also significant that Freddie himself will not venture out after sunset. Indeed, the unpaid watchman is doing a fine job! He keeps both intruders and owner behind fastened doors!

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* See *Nine Man-Eaters and one Rogue,* George Allen & Unwin, London.

Six

The Creatures of the Jungle

Much has been written about the big game and carnivore of Africa, and a great deal about tigers, panthers and elephants in India. In this wealth of literature the smaller animals tend to be forgotten.

One of them, the Indian wild dog, which goes under the Latin name of *cyon dukhuensis,* is a most interesting animal, very closely resembling and related to the domestic dog in appearance and habits. In colour it is reddish brown, turning to white on the belly. The hair along the back is dark brown or even black, the tips of the ears often black, with a short bushy tail, having a tuft of black hair at its extremity. Sometimes within and at the end of this black tuft is a smaller tuft of white hair. A male dog weighs over forty pounds and stands almost two feet high. The neck and jaws are massive, the chest deep, but the waist narrow, indicating that the animal is built for speed. It has structural differences from its domestic cousin in its skull and teeth, and it has more mammae. The feet and toes are hairy, and the tracks rather more pointed than those by domesticated dogs.

Wild dogs appear to congregate in packs to a greater extent during the hot weather. Perhaps this has some instinctive connection with the fact that water is scarce in the jungles at that time and the deer upon which they feed are more concentrated in the vicinity of water holes at which they are compelled by circumstances to drink. About October these packs dissolve into pairs; this is the breeding season and the pups are born during the cold weather. They may number about five to a litter, their home being a cave between rocks or a hole in the ground. At weaning the bitch feeds her pups on raw meat that she eats first from a kill, partially digests and then regurgitates for the benefit of her offspring. The young grow rapidly in intelligence and sagacity. From an early age they evince great ferocity at the smell or sight of blood and raw flesh.

Wild dogs have keen senses of sight, hearing and scent, particularly the last-mentioned, which helps them to find their quarry. They attack any living creature in the forest, including adult tigers and panthers, and the calves of bison, but avoid elephants, men, hyaenas and jackals, probably considering the last-mentioned as near cousins. An exception to this general code of behaviour occurred, however, when the six wild-dogs attacked and killed a hyena—Jackie's mother—as I have already related. This proves that there are no hard and fast rules with wild animals. The unexpected often takes

place.

I have known of more than one case in the Chittor district of Andhra Pradesh where these dogs have torn a tiger to ribbons after suffering a considerable number of casualties themselves. It is probable that the tiger, accustomed always to be the aggressor and to terrorizing the animals he hunts, is quite at a loss when hunted himself and psychologically defeated even before the dogs drive home their attack in numbers. Panthers and monkeys escape by climbing trees or rocks, but the confused tiger is overwhelmed before he knows what is happening. Wild dogs hunt by day, favouring the hot hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. They will also occasionally hunt at other times and on bright moonlit nights. I have never known them to hunt on a dark night. While on the chase they make a peculiarly sharp, high-pitched yelp which might be mistaken for a bird-call. Should they be hunting a large animal, like a sambar, the main body of the pack will gallop behind at a leisurely pace while 'flankers' will run ahead to ambush the quarry. Their method of attack is very cruel, as they fasten on to the hunted animal and literally tear him to bits alive. The eyes, nose, throat, ears, abdomen and testicles are favourite points of attack.

Once, when I was sitting on the bank of a dry stream, a full-grown sambar doe broke cover and ran across pursued by wild dogs; her intestines were dragging in the sand and for about twenty feet behind her. Both her eyes had been bitten out, her face was torn in a ghastly manner, and two dogs had their teeth embedded in her flanks and were being dragged along by the still-galloping sambar. There have been quite a number of instances where deer hunted by these dogs have run into a village to try to save themselves from their relentless foes, preferring the company of men to the ruthless destroyers. Unfortunately the villagers, who are only interested in meat, fail to appreciate this and kill the deer for themselves, driving the dogs away.

I was once resting from the noon-day heat beneath a tree at Mamandur when I heard the peculiar yelp of wild dogs. Hastening towards the yelps, I found a full-grown sambar hind standing up to her chest in a pool of water into which she had galloped to try to save herself. Several dogs were swimming out to her, while two had already reached her. One of them had climbed onto her back and was biting her neck. Four rapid shots from the Winchester disposed of four of them, while the remainder ran back into the jungle. The sambar hind still stood in the water, gazing at me with wide, terror-striken eyes. I waded into the pool and went up to her. Then I touched her, expecting she would gallop away. The poor creature was trembling with fear and did not move. I stroked her neck, but she did not even

look at me. Her head and large ears were turned towards the spot where the dogs had disappeared. Finally I started pushing her out of the pool in the opposite direction. Even when she reached the bank she did not run till I gave her two sharp slaps on her rump. That seemed to bring her to her senses and she galloped off. She had been badly bitten and several strips of flesh and skin were hanging from the wounds. The canine teeth of wild dogs are curved backwards to a greater degree than those of their domestic cousins. This not only enables them to retain their grip on a running quarry, but helps them to tear out great chunks of flesh when attacking or feeding.

These animals are great killers. They will not eat carrion or decayed meat, nor touch the kills of other animals. Their practice is to slay for themselves, and slay often, so that they may enjoy the warm, red blood and hot fresh meat. They are by far the most destructive creatures of the jungles. For this reason, rewards are paid all over the peninsula for their destruction, with a higher reward for bitches and puppies. The skin and skull must be produced when claiming the reward.

With all their ferocity, wild dogs exhibit a strange friendliness towards a domesticated cousin should they meet one in the jungle. Several times, when out with my dog Nipper, he has come tearing back to me with one or more wild dogs gambolling playfully at his heels—not always puppies, but fully grown animals too. On such occasions I have not had the heart to shoot them, but have stood still to watch what would happen. They have approached to within a yard of me, wagging their tails and fawning at Nipper, making the whining sound that any dog makes when he wants to be friendly. I have remained motionless and they have continued to run round in circles, just out of reach, ignoring me completely but trying to make friends with Nipper. Unfortunately he would never respond but appeared very afraid. Even when I walked away, with Nipper literally between my legs, they would follow closely, wagging away their tails and whining in a friendly manner.

I have never known or heard of a single instance of men being attacked or bitten by wild dogs, but they are strangely fearless of the human race and will stand and look at man without running away when a tiger or panther or elephant would have bolted. I have fired at wild dogs and shot one or two while the rest of the pack lingered in the vicinity. On other occasions, from behind cover, I have shot a dog and, instead of running away, the pack have approached and sniffed at the dead animal. I have been told that under such conditions they will even eat their dead companion.

Once near Dimbum, in North Coimbatore district, when turning a corner of the road in the Studebaker, I came upon a wild bitch

crossing the road followed by three half-grown puppies. Not wanting to shoot the mother or the pups, I stopped the car abruptly, sprang out and gave chase. But I had scarcely passed a few yards into the jungle when the three pups left their mother and came yelping around me, zwagging their tails but keeping just out of reach. It was evident from

the expressions on their faces that they were just dying to make friends but could not screw up sufficient courage to come any closer. The mother stood aloof, calmly regarding me and her offspring with dispassionate eyes. I am told they can be easily tamed if caught young and make good pets, but I have not, so far, had the opportunity to prove this for myself.

It is a strange fact that the number of wild dogs in any part of the forest is subject to extreme fluctuation. At times a section of jungle will literally teem with them. At other times, not one is to be seen and no tracks are to be found. Some of the aborigines have told me that they are prone to some strange disease, and that at such times they have come upon the dead bodies of a number of wild dogs rotting in the jungle. No animal will go near a dead wild dog to eat it; not even a hyaena or jackal. Vultures are the only creatures that will clean up such carcases if they find them. Personally, I have never come across the dead body of a wild dog that has not been killed by some other living creature, and my own theory is that nature has provided that these animals should be extremely restless and constantly on the move. If they remained permanently in any one locality soon hardly a creature would be left alive there.

I have never heard of wild dogs or hyaenas contracting rabies, but have known of several instances of jackals getting hydrophobia and biting human beings and other animals. Probably due to their excursions into villages in search of offal they have contracted the complaint from a rabid village dog, after which they have spread it among themselves.

There is a village named Jowlagiri at the edge of the jungle in the Salem district, only about forty-three miles from Bangalore. South-west of Jowlagiri and about three miles away is a silent pool in the forest surrounded by rocky hills with heavy bamboo growing in the intersecting valleys. It is a place where panthers often come to drink. The full moon was due one night when I ate an early dinner and motored to Jowlagiri, taking a few sandwiches and Nipper, my dog, which I had procured under unusual circumstances from the village of Devarabetta, only about nine miles from Jowlagiri.[1] My intention was to sit at this water hole till about midnight on the off-chance of a panther coming along, but more to enjoy the solitude and the moonlight. I reached Jowlagiri by 7 p.m., and the water hole less than an hour later.

But I had been forestalled. Poachers, who had come to shoot an unwary deer that might seek water, were already there. In the bright moonlight I saw two figures wrapped in black blankets scurrying away through the jungle, bent double, one of them carrying a gun. I approached the spot from which they had fled. At the foot of a large tree I found a well constructed 'hide' overlooking the water hole. In their haste to escape the poachers had left an electric torch behind, also a small flask of black powder, a tin box of percussion caps and a cloth bag containing pieces of lead which was the ammunition they used for their flintlock. Considering these articles as the 'spoils of war', I sat down with Nipper in the hide. Just after 10 p.m. Nipper scrambled up alert. Then around the corner came a spotted doe at full gallop, with half-a-dozen wild dogs in pursuit. She ran headlong into the pool to save herself, while the six dogs halted momentarily on the bank.

That was when I opened fire and shot three of them. The remaining dogs began to run away and I was about to fire a fourth round when things began to happen. Something huge crashed down the tree and fell beside me, almost on top of Nipper, who leapt into the air in alarm. It was a human being. For a moment I was so surprised that I failed to grab him. Like lightning he scrambled to his feet and fled.

Then I realized what had happened. There had been a third poacher fast asleep in the tree above me. He had been oblivious to the departure of his two comrades and my arrival. My three rifle shots had so startled him that he had fallen off his perch. But this was not the end of it. Not by any means. The wretched man had run into the jungle instead of towards a village that was hardly a mile away. From somewhere in the jungle I heard him screaming to his village for help, voicing the most extraordinary falsehoods. He said that someone had come to the water hole and had shot him. He said that he had run away, but was in danger of being followed and shot again. He was imploring his friends to come and rescue him.

Soon I heard answering shouts from the village. In the midst of all this pandemonium I knew there was no chance whatever of a panther or any other living creature coming to the water hole. The spotted doe which the dogs had chased had also run away. I came out of hiding with Nipper and looked at the three dogs I had shot. It was impossible for me to carry three carcases and my rifle, so I decided to skin the dogs and take only their pelts.

I had already begun this task when Nipper began to bark frantically, and before I quite knew what was happening a large party of men rushed out from the jungle towards me. In the vanguard I counted five musketeers, all pointing their muzzle-loaders straight at

me. There were other men behind them, armed with hatchets, knives and staves. Quickly I realized the only thing to do was to appear nonchalant and put up as brave a front as possible. So I continued to skin the wild dog, as if the group's appearance was of absolutely no concern of mine. They crowded round. Then one of them spoke to me roughly:

'Where is the body of our companion whom you have shot?' he demanded.

'Shot?' I feigned great surprise and indignation. 'Your friend jumped down from the tree and ran away. I never shot him.'

'We heard three shots,' he stated emphatically.

'Are you quite sure?' I asked.

'Absolutely certain,' he replied testily, and then repeated, 'three shots.'

'You are quite correct,' I concluded. 'I fired three shots, and here are three dead wild dogs. How could I have shot your friend?'

The logic of this argument sank into them slowly. 'But he called out to us that he had been shot and you were going to kill him.'

'I know,' I answered. 'I heard him too. Your friend is a fool, a coward and a liar. He is hiding somewhere in the jungle. Call out to him now and he will probably answer you.'

All together they began calling and whistling. Soon he answered them. The party of men who had been so belligerent a moment before now looked at each other sheepishly. I knew they were defeated and that I had them in my hands. I determined to press home my advantage by staging a counterattack.

I had left my Winchester in the hide and was unarmed. Slowly I got to my feet and addressed their leader: 'You have dared to accuse a *sahib* of murdering your idiotic friend,' I thundered. 'Remember, I am a licence-holder in this forest and am entitled to shoot here, while he is a poacher, caught red-handed.'

Then, before they could interrupt, I continued: 'I will now make you a sporting offer, because I am a sportsman myself. Either you will soundly beat this man for telling lies, or I will beat him. In addition he will have to carry these three dead dogs to my car at Jowlagiri. If you agree to my terms, I promise you on my word that I shall forget the matter and say nothing to anyone. If you do not agree, I shall not only report him, but your whole village for threatening me with weapons, and shall have your firearms confiscated.'

There was silence while they looked at one another. Then each man told the other to speak. Finally the leader began hesitantly: 'I shall beat the fool myself,' he said, 'and will make him carry the three dogs for you. But will you promise not to report us?'

'I have already promised,' I replied. Then, indicating the hiding

place beneath the tree: 'Someone's torch is there, and powder-flask, tin of caps and bag of pellets. Take them, and bring me my rifle.'

A man scampered off to carry out this command. Just then the man who had been the cause of all the uproar walked boldly out of the jungle and jauntily approached us. The poor fellow did not know what was in store for him. As he came within reach, the leader struck him full in the face. He fell to the ground, when another man kicked him viciously. His surprise soon gave way to yells of terror and pleas for mercy. The leader hauled him to his feet by seizing his hair.

'Show me where you have been wounded?' he hissed.

The man timorously answered, 'I heard three shots and I thought I had been hit.'

Eventually they stopped beating him and he was a sorry wreck. Then they loaded the three dead dogs on his back and invited me to sling my rifle around his neck as well. But the weight would have been too great. I knew the three dogs weighed perhaps forty pounds each, and I did not want the man to fall and damage my rifle. So I replied that I always made a practice of carrying my own rifle.

I parted the best of friends that night or rather early morning, as it was past midnight by the time it was all over, with the group of men who had come with the probable intention of murdering me. Then I turned towards Jowlagiri and the car, with Nipper at my heels and the unfortunate poacher, staggering beneath the weight of the three dogs, ahead, just in case he should suddenly drop them and run away.

Another animal about which little has been written is the Indian wild pig, better known as the wild boar. In former times there were stories of how the hardy Nimrods engaged in 'pigsticking'—that is, hunting boar on horseback with spears. A few of these blood-thirsty old hunters varied the sport by maintaining packs of dogs, some of them mongrels, but mostly of bull terrier stock, which they employed to hunt down not only wild boar, but bears as well and, in one instance, even bison. When the hunted animal was engaged by the dogs, the hunter would arrive on the scene and dispose of it, either by shooting or spearing it from horseback.

As a dog lover, I think this so-called sport was decidedly brutal, particularly when employed against wild boar. The most courageous dog has little chance against a fully roused boar, and many members of a pack were torn to ribbons by the tusks of the infuriated pig. And even when the gallant boar was eventually killed, either by shooting or spearing, he was scarcely given a fair chance to show his mettle, engaged as he was in staving off the attacks of a host of dogs.

The wild boar is the most courageous animal in the Indian jungle with the exception, perhaps, of the ratel, a much smaller quadruped,

half-mongoose and half-bear. The quality that I admire about him is that when he turns to fight he will fight to the death. There is no running away thereafter, for him. He will either emerge as victor or sacrifice his life. This does not imply that the boar is an aggressive animal, ranging the forest looking for a fight and something to kill. Left to himself he is quite inoffensive. I have many times met wild boar face to face at close quarters and unexpectedly, but never have they assumed the offensive, as a sloth bear would invariably do. They have either stood still or made off to avoid an encounter. But when pursued, pushed amd harried, or when wounded and followed up, they will turn about to fight. That means a charge. Even when a wounded panther attacks, it is not an attack unto death; it is a hit-and-run affair. But the boar will charge repeatedly until it has disposed of its antagonist.

On several occasions I have come across the results of a fight between a tiger and a wild boar. Generally the pig is killed, but it is only after giving an excellent account of himself and seriously gashing his opponent. The copious blood-trail left by the departing tiger has proved this. In a few cases the result has been different: the tiger has been killed or has given up the fight and run away after being severely punished by the boar. Once in Targathy I came upon the remains of a dead boar and a dead tigress, about twenty yards apart. The boar had evidently died first for he was facing the scene of combat; then the tigress had attempted to crawl away, but death had overtaken her. The boar had been bitten through the throat and had died; the tigress's belly had been ripped open and her intestines had fallen through the gap, while the artery in her neck had been slashed by an upward thrust of the boar's sharp curved tusks.

A large wild boar can weigh up to 300 pounds and more, while his curved tusks grow to eight inches in length. He has intelligence and muscle, and the heart of a fanatical warrior. Left to themselves, wild pigs are companionable animals, moving in sounders. They have great love for their young, whom they will defend gallantly. Pigs have fondness for water and are always to be found in its vicinity. Their diet is very varied, ranging from roots, insects, offal and cultivated crops, to lizards, snakes and the kills made by a tiger or panther, as well as cattle that have died in the fields from disease. They are also fond of wild fruit, particularly the acid, jungle-growing mango and figs, and they devour these in large quantities when they fall from the trees. The sow makes a proper nest for herself of sticks or grass or fallen bamboo branches, under which she burrows before giving birth.

The large boars often fight among themselves for the coveted position of leader of the sounder, using their tusks freely and fiercely and inflicting terrific damage upon each other. In the cold weather,

and during the rains, they huddle together for warmth, often sleeping on top of one another like a pyramid. I was once motoring from Lingadhalli up the Kemangondi Ghat road. It was pouring with rain. Suddenly the headlights revealed an obstacle before me: what appeared to be a mass of boulders piled one upon the other in the middle of the road, I found was a sounder of wild pigs, huddled together in a pile for warmth from the cold and rain.

Before charging a boar gives two or three loud, sharp grunts. Then his little tail sticks up behind him and along he comes. When cornered, wild boar have been known to charge a solid line of beaters, a feat which even the most ferocious tiger, including a man-eater, seldom attempts. Instances have been known of a wounded boar, when being followed up, making a detour and attacking his pursuers from the rear. I did not believe these rumours till I experienced the very thing myself when I fired at a large boar one morning near Panapatti, on the banks or the Chinar river, but he got away, although I knew I had hit him. Reaching the spot at which I had shot him, I found blood and began to follow his trail. It led across the sandy bed to the bank of the river, and then down a *nullah* between two low hillocks. I was following his tracks in this *nullah,* and could clearly see them leading ahead, when I heard the two familiar grunts from close behind me. I turned around just in time to see the boar charging at me down the bank of the *nullah* a few yards away and from the rear. I was able to shoot him just in time. Had he not given himself away by his grunts, I would not be writing this today. It was clear that he knew he was being followed, so he left the bed of the *nullah,* climbed up the bank and retraced his steps to attack me from behind. All this shows a high degree of intelligence. After I had shot him I verified this by following his blood-trail along the detour he had made.

On another occasion, with my cousin, Stewart Hearsey, and a friend named Willie Thomas, I was beating for pig at Yercaud on the Shevaroy Hills. A huge boar passed me. I fired, but missed. Then Stewart fired, but also missed. Lastly, Willie Thomas fired; he did not miss, but only wounded the boar. At once the pig turned and charged. Willie, who fired his second barrel, failed to stop him. The next instant Willie was on the ground and had been gashed from chin to temple by a slashing thrust from the pig's tusk as he galloped past. Had Stewart and I not been there to put an end to the gallant old boar, he would surely have returned and then Willie's days on this planet would certainly have ended. Willie Thomas, who has shot many panthers and much big game, considers this encounter his closest to death. He still bears the scar to this day.

The sloth bear is a creature that has always interested me greatly. Perhaps this is so because he is quite common and I have

often come across him, both in his wild state in the forests and in civilized areas in the keeping of itinerant 'bear-men', who lead trained specimens along and make them wrestle or dance before an audience. The keynote of a bear's nature is absolute unpredictability! You can never know for certain what it may decide to do next. This is the chief cause of the many maulings suffered by people who move about in jungles where bears are numerous. Bears are heavy sleepers, sometimes slumbering in long grass or in holes they have dug. When they sleep they sleep soundly, often snoring in the process. A passing man almost literally stumbles over a bear before it wakes up with a start and finds an enemy so close. Then things invariably happen—to the man.

Bears have very poor sight and poor hearing as well. Their sense of smell seems to be restricted to locating food in the form of grubs, insects, termites, roots and fruit, and they do not seem able to scent the proximity of human beings. When startled, they seek a way of escape. But their reflexes are equally poor and they perhaps feel that their only hope of escape is to down the intruder first. They attack with teeth and claws, always making for the face or chest. I have seen some horribly mutilated faces of people suddenly attacked in this way without provocation. Often one or both eyes have been torn out.

When camping at Mamandur, word was brought to me at night that two men, while carrying honey from the jungle that afternoon, had been attacked by a tiger when crossing a *nullah* and one of them had been killed. I took out a rescue party with lanterns, accompanied by the man who had escaped and who insisted that it was a tiger he had seen, to lead us to the place where the tragedy had occurred. We found the corpse, but one look at the face that had been torn to shreds convinced us that the killer was not a tiger. A careful scrutiny of the sandy ground of the *nullah* showed that a sloth bear with her young had been sleeping by the bank. Not only had the sudden advent of the man startled the mother, but the presence of her cub, whom she instinctively defended from imagined or anticipated assault, had caused her to slay without provocation. When confronted with the evidence, the man who led me to the spot confessed that he had never waited to see the animal. Hearing a growl, followed by his friend's scream of terror and pain, he had started running and had not stopped till he reached the village of Mamandur.

On another occasion I was camping in the Chamala Valley with my son, who was only about fourteen at the time. The valley abounds in sambar and spotted deer; stags of both varieties with good heads are common. For some time Donald had been worrying me to let him shoot a stag. My deer-shooting days had long passed and I had reached a stage when I had ceased killing these beautiful and

inoffensive creatures, so I tried hard to infect Donald with my ideas. But being a youngster he was all the more persistent and continued to pester me, so I eventually gave in.

In those days Donald did not possess his own rifle. He borrowed mine and set off before dawn next morning on his blood-thirsty quest. I followed him, but some paces behind, to give him the opportunity of getting the shot he wanted. The Chamala valley has some beautiful stretches of park-like country, which I particularly like. We arrived at one of these spots just as the grey of dawn was breaking over a large hill to the east, known as Monkey Hill. Donald was about 100 yards ahead of me, moving from tree-trunk to tree-trunk in the hope of seeing a stag.

Suddenly I saw him halt abruptly and from the ground, seemingly at his very feet, reared a shaggy black shape which I immediately recognized as a sloth bear. It stood on its hind legs, apparently about to attack him, when mercifully it changed its mind and just as suddenly dashed away with a loud 'Woof! Woof!' Being a mere boy at that time, Donald was as surprised as the bear. To this day he considers it the narrowest shave he has had.

Bears move about at night. Sometimes they may be met in the evening or at dawn — as Donald met the bear that early morning! But once I met one at about two in the afternoon, at the hottest time of the day. The meeting took place in the Chamala Valley. I had gone there with my wife on this occasion, taking my old friend and *shikari,* Ranga, from the Salem district, along with me. We had been for an afternoon stroll to a water hole, known as Gundalpenta, and were returning to our camp near a Forestry department's well at a place named Pulibonu. There were three of us—my wife, Ranga and myself —and Ranga was wearing a black coat, black shorts, and was bare-legged. I was in front, with my wife behind me; Ranga was bringing up the rear.

The path we were following turned a corner. There, some yards away, was a termite hill, and standing up against it and intently looking down one of the holes in the hill was a black figure. For the moment my wife forgot that Ranga was behind her, and thinking my retainer was examining the termite-hill she called out in Tamil: 'What are you looking at Ranga?'

The black figure turned around, and of course it was not Ranga. It was a sloth bear. Surprised at seeing the three of us, he continued to stare at us foolishly, like a short-sighted human.

Then Ranga—the real Ranga this time—called out: *'Karadi!* (Bear!). Hai! Shoo!' Off went Bruin for dear life, muttering an indignant, if startled, 'Woof! Woof!'

Bears are very fond of sucking termites out of their hills. They

apply their snouts to holes in the termite hill, or sometimes dig these holes themselves, then blow air into the earth, and finally start sucking for all they are worth. The medley of sound emitted is both curious and amusing. It resembles the buzzing of bees or hornets, and at times the groaning drone of a bagpipe as it deflates. They have a curious habit, too, of sucking their forepaws, which they do assiduously with a persistent humming sound. Some experienced hunters have suggested that it is to soothe their paws when hurt or sore from the effect of constant digging, but I do not think this is so, because our tame bear, Bruno, about which I have written elsewhere in this book, often sucks his paws, though they are by no means sore or hurt from digging. I am convinced there is some sort of secretion from between the toes— whether it be sticky, sweet or salty I do not know— which makes this habit attractive to all sloth bears.

They are very intelligent animals. They have an uncanny intuition that leads them to the different varieties of fruit-trees in the forest when those particular fruits are in season. The boram berry is an example. Especially in the Chamala valley, bears appear in large numbers just after these fruit have become over-ripe and begin to fall to the ground. The same can be said for the wild-mangoes, which are stringy, acid and unpalatable to the human taste, though they are a delicacy to bears; for 'jak-fruit', that do not grow in jungles as a rule but are planted in the cultivated areas bordering the forest; for sugar-cane, that is set in large squares on agricultural ground; and particularly for the jamun or *jumlum,* grape-like purple berries that fall in thousands from the parent tree in July and August each year, to carpet the ground with a purplish-black, slightly astringent fruit.

Jumlum trees grow densely along the banks of the Chinar river in Salem district, and bears turn out in large numbers during those months to gormandize the fallen fruit. In my earlier years I shot a few, but soon found this a tame and unsporting pastime. I would visit the trees in the afternoon with my assistants, Ranga and Byra, and one or two more men if available, and gather the fallen *jumlums* into an immense heap at the foot of one of the parent trees. The more fruit we could gather and the bigger the heap, the better for my plan.

I would come prepared with a very powerful catapult made of rubber cut from an old inner tube from a bus or lorry, and a pocketful of smooth pebbles, gathered from the riverbed. Climbing into the tree before sunset and on moonlight night, with my rifle in case of eventualities, I would await the coming of the sloth bears. Around eight o'clock they would turn up, one by one; large, black, grumbling, rumbling and lumbering creatures. What a spread they found awaiting them! I am sure they must have thought they were in Paradise! Soon the mound of *jumlums* would have four, five or more bears tucking

into it.

And now came the time for some fun. I slipped my hand into my pocket, felt for a suitable pebble, fitted it into the leather sling of the catapult and took careful aim at the biggest of the bears beneath me—perhaps only twelve to fifteen feet away. I stretched the rubber to its utmost and then let fly. The pebble hit the big, black bear hard on the back of his neck, then all hell was let loose!

'Damn this fellow at my side,' he apparently thought, as he bit viciously his innocent neighbour.

'You want to fight, do you?' the neighbour questioned as he bit his next neighbour in turn. And so it went on, till there was a mass of fighting bears below me, screaming their heads off, while I sat as quiet as a mouse in my tree. Somehow they sorted themselves out with yells of protest, squeals of pain, and many grunts of indignation. There was much snuffling and shuffling and huffing, but after some time they forgot the silly incident and settled down once again to gorge upon the fruit spread before them.

Then the catapult spoke for the second time, and the yelling, screaming, biting and tearing black mass of bears went for one another once more, this time for longer. But finally they settled down to eat and tried to overlook each other's nastiness. Then the catapult let fly a third time! That really was a fight! Eventually some of the bears broke away and began to wander off. The place seemed to them unhealthy.

But suddenly one of the bears looked up and saw me. So this was the nigger in the woodpile! Pandemonium reigned as he screamed with fear and indignation. His hysteria spread to the other bears and they all screamed and yelled in unison. Only once did one of the bears think of doing something about me. He rushed to the foot of the tree and began to climb up the trunk. I thought I would have to shoot him with my rifle, which I had brought with me as a precaution. But I made a final attempt to drive him away. Using the catapult once more, I hit him squarely in the face. Protesting loudly to the whole jungle, he fell to the ground with a thud. Then he scrambled hastily to his feet and, still complaining vociferously, bounded away.

This habit of biting one another when one of them has been hurt is common behaviour with bears. Should two be together and one be wounded by a gun or rifle shot, he or she will invariably attack the other savagely. Sloth bears can climb trees easily when they want to. They go up after beehives, which they knock down to the ground and then devour. They have also been known to drink toddy from the pots fixed on date palms to collect the fluid. This intoxicates them to some extent, as do the thick petals of the *mhowa* flower when it falls to earth. Although they can ascend trees without much trouble they find

difficulty in descending. Sometimes they try to slide down backwards. At other times they just let go and thud to earth. Apparently they never seem to hurt themselves in that way.

Although they are irritable and get easily excited, sloth bears are most affectionate towards their young and each other. When alone and wounded, one will scream aloud in complaint and tell the jungle all about it. His companions will add to the screaming out of sympathy. They have known to try to succour one another and I have heard of the case of a male bear trying to remove the dead body of his mate that had been shot. Female bears carry their young—there are generally two cubs born at a time—on their backs till they are quite big, and will defend them at the cost of their own lives. All bears, including the males, have a patch or tuft of very long hair on their backs, just behind the shoulder blades. Presumably this is to provide a better 'grip' for the cubs when mother is travelling fast.

It is a mistake to think that the sloth bear is purely vegetarian, confining his diet to roots and yams, together with insects. This is very definitely not so. More than once, when sitting over tiger and panther kills, Bruin has turned up and started to devour the carcass, even when it was getting fairly high. Bruno, our tame bear, is very fond of all kinds of flesh, especially pork, venison and the flesh of wild ducks.

The claws, particularly on the forepaws of a sloth bear, are white, very long (almost four inches) and very powerful. The tracks made by his hind feet closely resemble a human footmark without the toes. The body of the animal, after it has been skinned, looks very much like a human body, and very well muscled.

Bears must feel the heat to some extent, clothed as they are in long and thick black hair. They are fond of water and often dig holes in the sand of dry riverbeds in an attempt to reach the little that will percolate through. They are noisy creatures and make a variety of sounds. When moving in pairs, but at a distance from each other, they maintain contact by a constant medley of very curious sharp, gurgling cries. Should one of them locate a nest of insects under a log of wood or a stone, he or she will immediately call the other bear by a series of squeals and happy squeaks.

A very curious creature of the Indian jungle is the five-toed pangolin, which goes under the somewhat formidable Latin name of Manis pentadactyla. Averaging about three and a half feet in length, of which about half is his tail, he is encased in an armour of thick, overlapping, sharp-edged scales, and rolls himself into a ball when touched. The pangolin is very rarely seen and most people, even experienced hunters, do not know of his existence. This is because he is entirely nocturnal, to the extent that he rarely emerges from his hole in the ground before 1a.m., and not on every night, moreover,

but only occasionally. His actual den is at the end of a tunnel and about ten feet below the surface. It is useless to try to dig one out, for the deeper you dig the deeper the pangolin goes. You will never be able to catch up with him, for nature has provided him with claws particularly suited to burrowing.

The best way to see or catch a specimen is to look for his tracks in the mud of a water hole, where they form a peculiar parallel row of sharp indentations or holes as he approaches the edge to drink. Having found the water hole you will have to sit up night after night, and all night, during the period of moonlight, until you catch a glimpse of him rolling from side to side over the mud till he reaches the edge of the water. This peculiarly rolling gait is due to the fact that the pangolin walks upon the knuckles of his feet, the claws of his forefeet being turned inwards, while the soles of his hind legs are turned outwards and upwards. The rows of parallel indentations that betray his passing are formed by the backs of the inwardly-folded claws.

When he is clear of the shrubbery and is in the middle of the mud, it is comparatively easy to rush upon him; he will then curl himself into a ball at once. Although inoffensive otherwise, a pangolin can cut your hand badly with the edges of his razorsharp scales by a quick jerk of his body or tail. Should you allow the pangolin to regain the cover of the jungle, he might escape you, for he has a habit of 'lying doggo' in a clump of thick grass or a bush till you have passed, when he will crawl out in the opposite direction and move away at a pace equal to a fast walk.

When caught, a pangolin generally makes a hissing noise, as does the oodumbu or iguana. In moving, the scale rustle faintly against one another like the quills of a porcupine. When hurrying away he will keep the tail off the ground so that it will not become an impediment. As might be expected of an entirely nocturnal animal, and one that lives deep underground, he cannot see very well in bright sunlight. I have noticed the same thing with a hyaena. Pangolins are said to be powerful swimmers, although I have never seen one in water. But I have observed that, when burrowing beneath boulders, they have been strong enough to move the stone away despite its weight.

An animal for which I have a special affection is the hyaena, perhaps for no better reason than that most sportsmen appear to regard him with contempt, unworthy even of a photograph or bullet. This prejudice is so great that many hunters of my own acquaintance seem to have closed their minds—and their eyes—to his very existence, and declare that hyaenas are rare in the forests of South India. I really do not know how they can be so wrong, as I know of scarcely a jungle where hyaena tracks are not to be found in the sandy

bed of a river, or traversing ravines and *nullahs*.

Only one special species of hyaena is to be found in India — the striped hyaena, Hyaena striata. A fully-grown specimen is almost as tall as a Great Dane, with a head considerably larger and broader. It is ash-grey in colour with black stripes, and has a black patch over the throat. It has large, long, pointed ears, a broad forehead, an immensely powerful jaw, broad chest and tremendously thick and strong forelegs, ending in large hairy paws. The back tapers considerably to a miserably weak haunch and hindquarters, and inadequate, puny-looking hind legs. Its spoor is therefore very distinct from that of a panther, although the pugs are about as big, because the hyaena's forepaws are about twice the size of its hind paws and are round, whereas the latter are elongated. The impressions of a hyaena's toe-nails, which are not retractable, are clearly visible in the tracks, whereas the pug-marks of a panther are quite different. The panther's front and hind paws are of about the same diameter, while the ball of the foot is much larger than a hyaena's, and the claws are retractable and therefore do not show.

I am convinced that the hyaena is an extremely unintelligent animal. He has very poor sight (particularly in the daytime), poor hearing, and (here I differ from other writers) a sense of smell which is only mediocre. I have carried out many tests with Jackie by throwing a piece of strong-smelling meat only a few yards away, when he has been unable to locate it. There is no doubt he could faintly smell the meat, for he ran aimlessly about in circles in his unsuccessful efforts to find it.

A habit I have noticed in Jackie when taking him for a walk is that every few minutes he will shuffle around in a circle, and almost always in an anticlockwise direction. But perhaps the most peculiar of his many unusual idiosyncrasies is that, every now and again, when he passes a bare stump of a tree, or a pillar or post, or a bush, he will literally dance around it, anticlockwise, with his forelegs stiff and hind legs doubled beneath him, hindquarters just off the ground. Then he will stop and for a few seconds his whole anus will protrude, as if about to pass a motion. But he emits gas instead and then straightens up and continues his way. The purpose may be to enable the wild hyaena to find his way back again by sniffing at such spots, although the theory is weakened considerably by the fact that his sense of smell is so poor.

But if his sense of smell is really so poor, how does a hyaena in the wild state locate dead and putrefying animals in the jungle? Perhaps the smell has to be brought to him on the wind before he can locate a kill. I am fully aware I am here entering upon highly debatable ground, because hyaenas all over the world are credited

with great ability to scent death and decay at a great distance, but the experiments I have made with Jackie have led to a quite different conclusion.

There is no doubt that a hyaena is very much attached to his own den, which may be a hole in the ground or between rocks or boulders, or a small cave, and that he inhabits the same place for years. I know of a pair living near Gundalam, on the Secret River, that have lived in the same small cave for over five years and have brought up several families there. Unlike all other animals, the same pair remain together for a long time. To some extent I have proved a hyaena's liking for a particular home by the fact that I had Jackie at my little cottage at Whitefield for several months, where I had given him a spare bathroom to live in. Though I left the outer door open night and day to enable him to go outside to answer the calls of nature (he never once attempted to run away), he did considerable damage to that small bathroom by breaking down the brick wall at all four corners to burrow holes, and by biting at both the inner and outer doors. So I removed him eventually to my house at Bangalore, after having an island dug for him in the compound, surrounded on all four sides by a trench four feet wide by four feet deep. On the island I had a large brick house built for him, with a roof of zinc sheets. Steps led down from the island to the trench, to enable him to go down and race around if he wanted to. But as soon as I put Jackie in his new home he went completely off his food for almost a fortnight, although he drank water.

Now it cannot be argued that it was me he missed, for I went with him to Bangalore. I maintained the same feeding-times, at midday and sunset, and gave him the same food, beef that was several days old and crawling with maggots. I even thought he might be missing the companionship of his playmate, Jill, my mongrel at Whitefield, so I brought Jill to Bangalore. Jackie was immensely pleased to see her, wagged his tail affectionately, and started to romp with her in his usual hearty and rough manner. But for all that, he would not eat his food. As might be expected, he lost weight and began to look miserable and thin, so that I was on the verge of giving in and taking him back to Whitefield. However, it occurred to me to cut his meat up into small pieces and to try feeding him a piece at a time. It was fifteen days before he consented to nibble even a little bit, just as it was becoming evident he would soon die of starvation. Then, little by little he began to eat again, although it was another fortnight before he returned to his normal hearty appetite. There is no doubt in my mind that this month of self-imposed starvation came about only because I shifted him from his little bathroom in my cottage at Whitefield, to which he had become attached since a puppy. He

missed his den.

During my efforts to overcome his total refusal of food, I let him loose within the bungalow. With my back turned for a minute, the first thing he did was to chew up Donald's alarm clock, greatly to my son's indignation. Jackie tried to make friends with my wife's pet, Ella the jackal, and wanted to play with her; but, although about one-sixth his size, she began to bite him savagely, though he did not bite back. I have already mentioned that both Gypsy and Jill, my dogs at Whitefield, although they used to play with him freely, at times would lose their tempers when he was too rough and would bite him. Never at any time did he attempt to retaliate upon animals that were far smaller than himself and infinitely weaker.

I have mentioned that the trench surrounding Jackie's island was only four feet wide and four feet deep. I had noticed while he was with me in Whitefield that because of his short and weak hind legs he was not able to jump more than two feet either up or across. But I think there is a good reason for this strange disproportion of the hyaena's build. I often watched Jackie while he was eating. He would hold a bone firmly between his powerful forelegs, doubled his hind legs beneath him, and then use the slope or slant of his disproportionate body as a lever to enable him to tear great chunks of flesh from the bone. He could not have acquired the necessary purchase or leverage with the straight back of a dog.

Should you approach the den, particularly when there are pups inside, the hyaena will generally become frightened and utter a deep-throated growl of a peculiarly vibratory, humming nature, continued for a long time. If much terrified, for example by the appearance of a tiger at a kill where he has been robbing, he will voice a loud, snarling yap, something like the short growl made by an angry tiger or lion, but not so loud. If you are watching while he does this, you will notice that he literally trembles with fear. Often he will pass urine involuntarily. Should the intruder be less dangerous than a tiger, say a panther or bear, the hyaena may howl (perhaps 'yowl' is a better word to describe the sound) in a dismal, mournful manner. Should you be sitting-up over a kill or a water hole and should the hyaena discover your presence, he will either run off at once, when you may hear him pitter-pattering away over the dried leaves, or he may become tremendously agitated, when he will produce a medley of noises that can only be described as 'chattering'. Most often, he begins with a hiss of disdain, a sort of derisive, spitting sound: 'Cheey! Shee-ay!' quite frequently uttering, before or after, a series of surprised and vehement exclamations: 'Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!' Then, as he warms to his indignant protest, come other peculiar noises: 'Garrar! Gurr-rr-aa! Guddar! Guddar! Guddar! Goo-doo! Goo-doo!'

Weird sounds indeed! But there is nothing whatever to be afraid of. The poor hyaena is just a bunch of nerves and is hoping you will end the same way. He is merely trying to drive you away with his clownish noises. He tries so hard to frighten you that he succeeds only in frightening himself. He will certainly not attack you, in spite of the pandemonium he creates.

This brings us to an often-debated question. Can a hyaena drive a tiger or a panther off its legitimate kill? Or, should he be caught in the act of robbing a kill, will the hyaena run away when the tiger appears, or will he attempt to frighten the real killer away? In my experience, there is only one answer: the hyaena will not wait a moment, he will just vanish.

But a pair of hyaena will make a cacophony of sound. It is a war of nerves. Sometimes a panther cannot tolerate the strange medley of noise and slinks away voluntarily. But should the panther be determined to hold his ground, a shouting match ensues until the nerves of one or other gives way. If the panther becomes threatening, the hyaena or hyaenas hesitate no longer; they bolt. For after all they are nothing but large, clumsy, unintelligent dogs, and in a straight encounter a panther would be able to dispose of them with ease. They are far too slow in their movements and too stupid to be able to withstand a determined attack, especially as a panther is an animal that can move like lightning. Even if two or three hyaenas were there they would lack the intelligence to coordinate their actions and fight together.

With a tiger, even half a dozen hyaenas would not stand the ghost of a chance. Although far larger, heavier and stronger than the wild dogs, they lack the latters' keen intelligence, swiftness of movement and almost suicidal courage. Yet it is strange that wild dogs do not as a rule molest them. It is a common sight to observe jackals and hyaenas feeding on the same kill. At such times they ignore each other's presence completely, while keeping a sharp lookout for the sudden return of the rightful owner of the kill, who would undoubtedly take immediate reprisals.

Despite their ungainly build, hyaenas can in emergency put up a fair turn of running speed. To an observer they appear to assume a galloping gait, much like a horse, and run askew. Perhaps this is because the hyaena holds his head at an angle when travelling fast, so giving his whole body a crooked appearance.

Hyaenas are the scavengers of the jungle, doing useful work by devouring kills and dead animals that would otherwise decompose slowly and pollute the atmosphere. Particularly in dense forest, where vultures cannot operate, because the heavy vegetation prevents them from 'spotting' the kill, hyaenas, jackals, wild pigs, and sometimes a

bear, all help to clear away a decomposing carcass rapidly.

Hyaenas eat only dead animals. Occasionally they may kill a fawn, a calf, dog or goat—always an animal far weaker than themselves. A hyaena's way of killing some small, defenceless animal is to sidle up to it, suddenly dip his head at an angle and grab the smaller creature by the throat. There is no denying the tremendous strength of those jaws or the grip that can crack a bone or bite through it with the greatest of ease. But the hyaena lacks the courage to attack any living creature unless it be far smaller than himself and quite defenceless.

A hyaena has a long mane of greyish-black hair from the back of the neck to the root of the bushy tail. When alarmed or excited or angry, this mane stands erect, increasing the height of the animal by about six inches and giving it a peculiarly flattish appearance. Despite a fierce and hideous face, the eyes have a peculiarly soulful expression. Although such a vile feeder, the hyaena's whole coat is extremely clean and free of any odour. In this respect they differ from vultures, which really stink. I have also found Jackie singularly free from ticks, fleas or other vermin, or at least he carries far fewer than the felines and deer. A full-grown male weighs over six stones and the bitch about a stone less. She gives birth to four or five puppies at a time and as usual with the young of carnivorous animals, no sooner are the eyes opened than they supplement their diet of mother's milk with partially digested raw meat, eaten by their mothers and then vomited out for their benefit. Although nocturnal in their wild state, I have come upon hyaenas basking in the morning sunlight at the entrances to their dens or caves. Occasionally, and especially in the foothills or the Nilgiris around Segur and Anaikutty, I have found them in broad daylight, lying up in thick grass or under a thorny bush beneath which they have made a burrow.

The first story in the book concerned an active partnership between a jackal and tiger. It may well be asked whether this is a common occurrence, for the question has been hotly debated for years by very experienced Indian hunters. My own opinion is—and it is only opinion and therfore not necessarily correct—that a jackal, being a highly intelligent creature, first attaches himself to a tiger or a panther as a parasite, knowing fully well that he is thereby sure of finding food, because the tiger or panther must kill to eat, and eat to live. By their very nature and by their habit of leaving the kill during daylight, the big cats also leave sufficient pickings for the parasite. During all this time the jackal takes very good care to keep its distance, and the tiger or panther may not even be aware of its existence in the earlier stages. As time goes on, the jackal—always the more intelligent of the two animals—finds that the habit of following its host about from kill

to kill continues to pay very high dividends. It may therefore happen quite naturally that the jackal adopts the practice of voicing a call should it come to discover a prospective victim, thus relaying the information to its host. The tiger or panther, although not actually relying upon the jackal to find its food, has by this time become accustomed to its presence and, being primarily a hunter after large prey to keep itself alive and provide a hearty meal, does not worry unduly about a creature which would not provide of itself nearly enough for a square meal. When the jackal begins to call, the carnivore knows something is afoot and is made aware of the presence of a victim.

It is commonly thought that tigers and panthers have a keen sense of smell, but this is definitely not so. Neither animal eats at the spot where the kill is made. Invariably it drags its victim to a shelter of some sort, such as a bush or *nullah.* When coming to eat a second time, the killer does follow the drag-mark by sniffing along the ground. It seems to remember exactly where it has left its kill, as it may return from any direction quite irrespective of which way the wind is blowing, and does not necessarily retrace its own footsteps. Further, I have often sat on the ground for both animals, in 'hides' of one description or another, and by remaining absolutely still, I have, regardless of the direction of the wind, had them approach to practically within touching distance without becoming aware of my presence. Even a half-developed sense of smell under such conditions would have warned them of my proximity, but they have remained completely ignorant while I kept quite still and made no sound. This in itself clearly shows that neither animal has any sense of smell whatever, although they possess the keenest sight, detecting the slightest movement, and the acutest hearing, picking up the faintest sound. The marvellous night-sight of both tigers and panthers enables them to conduct a soundless stalk through the densest jungle on the darkest of nights, an attribute that in itself makes them formidable enough without additional gifts.

The uninitiated townsman might be tempted to think that the bold colours of a tiger and the even more vivid coat of a panther would make them both extremely conspicuous in a jungle. But they are not. The tiger, which hunts invariably at night or in the evening, becomes invisible when he 'freezes' or crouches motionless, his skin blending with the background of bushes, grass, trees and earth. The panther is even less conspicuous, even in broad daylight; he can lie so flat to the ground, under a bush no longer than himself, or on a background of dried leaves and grass, that again, unless he moves, he is quite invisible. This blending of colours is one of the main hazards in following up a wounded animal of either species; the hunter is

liable almost to tread on it before he becomes aware of the creature's presence.

I have often been asked if it is really possible for a man to call like a tiger with sufficient realism to bring a tiger near. Have human lungs the capacity to utter such a tremendous sound? The answer to the last question is a very definite 'no'. Human lungs can never equal those of a tiger. But that means only that a man cannot call loud enough to attract the attention of a tiger some distance away. If the tiger is near, a well-imitated call can certainly bring him nearer. The factor that really attracts the tiger is curiosity. So long as one is experienced enough and skilled enough to imitate a tiger's call closely, even if the timbre differs somewhat, he will be drawn by a curiosity to find the 'tiger who is making that funny noise'.

The same can be said of a panther or many other wild animals. After all, in America various gadgets are sold that imitate the cries of moose, deer, wild-buck and various birds. I have a cousin who, with the aid of a blade of grass, can call exactly like a junglefowl or a spurfowl, and regularly lures these birds before shooting them. The only difference in imitating a tiger's call is that no instrument is used; but the principle is the same.

Tracking is a fascinating art, and, compared with some of the aborigines with whom it has been my privilege and pleasure to go out, I would regard myself as an absolute tyro at the game. An observant person who has seen many tiger and panther tracks may be led to ask: 'Why is it that a tiger sometimes leaves a double track, one that shows the pug-marks of all four feet, while at other times he leaves a single track as if he had only two legs like a man? And why does a panther, particularly the average-sized animals living close to villages, invariably make a double track only?

I think the answer is that the tiger, out for a casual stroll and not on the hunt, just ambles along serenely and leaves a double track. As soon as he becomes aware of the presence of a quarry and begins stalking, he exercises caution: he slows his pace and probably 'feels' the ground with each forefoot before placing it, thus making certain that he does not tread on a twig or leaf that might crackle and betray his presence. As an added precaution, he brings up his hind foot and places it in exactly the spot that his forefoot vacates as he takes the next step forward. Of course, he follows this practice instinctively and not by deliberation.

As to the panther, who 'creeps' the last stages of his stalk, with his belly close to the ground, he perhaps has no

opportunity of placing his hind feet in the spots vacated by his forefeet. A fact that appears to bear out this conjecture— and let me emphasize once again that it is, after all, nothing more than

conjecture—is that, whereas one can trail a tiger to the very spot from which he launches his final attack, it is seldom possible to do this when following a panther's spoor. The last few feet of the trail become indistinct, indicating the panther had begun to creep.

Another question I am asked is whether a tiger can really imitate a sambar's call, and if he does, whether it is in order to ambush a sambar. The answer to the first part of this question is very definitely yes. I have heard it happen. But to answer the second part of the question is difficult, for I have heard a tiger call like a sambar when approaching its kill, a young bull, in a stretch of jungle near Tagarthy where there were no sambar at all. On another occasion, in the Chamala Valley, a tiger called like a sambar when approaching his own kill, a dead buffalo, and when only a few feet away from it; in that stretch of forest there were many sambar.[2] But this tiger was not hunting; he was returning to his own kill. Both these examples appear to indicate that the 'pook' made by the tigers, although closely resembling the call of a sambar, more like that of a doe than a stag, were not made with the object of decoying a real sambar. The call may therefore express anticipation, contentment, hunger or enjoyment. Perhaps it is a call inviting a tigress to the feast, or it may be a kind of mating call, although I do not think so myself, as in neither of the cases mentioned was a tigress near.

The tiger—and I am now referring to the ordinary male and not to a man-eater—is generally an inoffensive beast and will do his best to avoid man. Even should a human being intrude upon his privacy, the tiger will slink off. So will a tigress for that matter, although she is more apt to growl or show some degree of resentment. There is an exception to this general rule, however, and that is at the time of mating and especially in the act of mating. Tigers are very fierce then and are apt to attack on sight, and will persist in their attack till they kill the man who has intruded upon their privacy. It may be a desire to 'show off to the tigress, although I think it is due rather to the high degree of sexual excitement into which they lash themselves. Anyway, one can hardly blame the tiger for resenting being spied upon at that particular moment.

I had rather a narrow escape when accompanying a friend, a German photographer who wanted to wander into a tiger sanctuary at night and take flashlight photographs. I tried to dissuade him on the ground that tigers are far from being photogenic, but he was adamant. It was early in October when we went, somewhat ahead of the regular mating season, which extends from the end of November till the end of January, and we were both on foot and unarmed, except for the flash-light camera, since in a sanctuary shooting is strictly prohibited and one cannot wander with a firearm of any description.

But as luck would have it, we suddenly came upon a pair of tigers. Fortunately they were not actually mating, but they resented our intrusion nevertheless. They growled, and side by side left the little clearing where we had surprised them and advanced on to the track along which we had just come.

The impulse was very strong to show these tigers what we could do by way of a sprint. But had we given in to that temptation, I am sure the pair of lovers would have been equally tempted to pursue us. So we 'retreated according to plan', which means a pretty fast walk while flashing the torch constantly behind us. Nevertheless the resentful pair followed us for well over a mile. At one particularly nasty spot, where the track traversed a deep and overgrown ravine, they galloped up to about twenty-five yards behind us. We coughed loudly and began to talk at a pitch that would have done credit to any public orator. This caused the enterprising tigers to fall back once more, and so we made our way out of a situation that was certainly for a moment a matter of touch and go.

The tigress usually goes into isolation before the cubs are born, because her mate has an inclination to kill and eat his offspring. She generally chooses a cave, although occasionally she may litter in a ravine or other overgrown spot. On an average, three to four cubs are born. These are fed on milk, and later on vomited meat, till they can digest stronger food. As they grow older they accompany the mother on her foraging expeditions. Then, after a while, papa rejoins them and the parents start teaching them the art of killing by breaking the neck of their victims. In this process much wasteful slaughter sometimes takes place; as many as four or five cattle from one herd are slain merely to give the juniors a lesson or afford them some practice. The young tigers frequently make a mess of the job, succeeding only in mauling their victims rather than killing them outright.

When the cubs are half-grown, one sometimes meets a family party of tigers, consisting of the male, female and several large cubs. I myself stumbled across a family of four one night at a place called Kodihalli near Tagarthy, when I was out for a night walk. They had just drunk at a stream and ascended the bank. First mama appeared. She saw me, growled, leapt across the track and began a peculiar vigorous mewing. This brought out the two cubs, who were about the size of spaniels. Seeing the torchlight, they were not in the least alarmed, but advanced a few feet playfully. At this unseemly behaviour, mama protested loudly by growling. Papa, who was in the rear, thought this behaviour intolerable. He sprang on to the path in front of them to block their progress and roared menacingly. That roar had the desired effect of not only frightening the cubs back to mama,

but myself almost to the point of shooting him. I was glad I did not do so when I realized his intentions were merely to admonish his playful offspring rather than to attack me.

Tigers have certain habits peculiar to themselves, in which they differ from panthers. Some of them—not all—make a practice of standing on their hind feet against the trunks of certain soft-barked trees, reaching as high as they can, and cleaning the claws of their forefeet by raking them through the soft bark. Their method of passing their dung is also different. In this respect a panther is a true cat; he will scratch up the earth beside a jungle pathway and afterwards carefully cover his excrement up. But not a tiger; he will scrape a patch of ground bare, about a foot square, sometimes right in the centre of the path. While doing this he appears to 'dance' in a crouched position with his hind feet together, trembling visibly. When passing their dung they hold their tails up ludicrously high. The dung is a sticky, black, tarry substance, and is left uncovered.

Another difference on which I have had occasion to remark is their way of feeding. Tigers start on their kills at the rectum, often biting off the tail of the animal to facilitate proceedings. Then they make an entrance and, inserting a paw into the carcass, scoop out the intestines and stomach, which they generally remove a few feet before eating. Panthers on the contrary are dirty feeders, and get the stomach and dung of their kill mixed up with the meat. But a large 'thendu', or forest panther, eats in the manner of a tiger and not like his smaller brethren.

Tigers are intolerant of the heat, which is not the case with panthers. They delight in lying up in cool and shady places, and may be seen submerged in a rill with only their heads above the surface. They are also fond of swimming and frequently cross rivers. The panther, which is a truer cat in every sense of the word, detests water even to the extent of curtailing his hunting expeditions on a rainy night. The only circumstance that will force him to swim a river might be a pack of wild dogs hot on his trail, or a forest fire. Under compelling conditions he can swim quite well.

Another difference in habit between the two animals is revealed during the series of meals each makes on any large animal he has killed. In between each gorge a tiger apparently must drink a good deal of water. Knowing this, it is fairly easy to locate the presence of the killer at the nearest water hole or stream to the kill and organize a 'beat' accordingly, provided the hunter is the type of man who prefers beating to sitting up in a *machan* and awaiting the tiger's return. But this is not so with a panther. He does not require nearly so much water, so he is difficult to locate.

Tigers often get into fights with bison, wild boar, bears and even

members of their own kind. They are fond of eating porcupines, but they do not always emerge unscathed from such an encounter. A few miles from Tagarthy I found a dead tigress with a number of porcupine quills in her face. Tigers will also kill panthers, and for this reason jungles where tigers are plentiful hold few panthers, who give way to their larger and more powerful cousins. Panthers are also not nearly so belligerent or courageous, and instances are known where even a village cur that has been attacked has turned on the panther in sheer desperation and the attacker has decamped.

Tigers are inordinately fond of pork, while panthers appear to consider monkey-meat a delicacy. Both felines will go to extraordinary lengths to procure these respective titbits and show great reluctance to abandon a favourite kill. Indeed, the tiger becomes really belligerent if one attempts to drive him off a succulent wild-pig, and a panther will demonstrate violently over the carcass of a langur monkey. After killing their prey, at least as far as my experience goes, I have not found a tiger suck the blood from the animal while retaining his grip on its throat. Perhaps this is because they kill quicker, the neck of the victim being quickly broken, while a longer and more painful death by suffocation is the lot of the panther's prey. A panther often sucks the blood of its victim.

Tigers are far more fastidious in their food than panthers, and it is therefore a great mistake to tie up a very old, emaciated or diseased bull or buffalo as bait for a tiger. Once, while at Anaikutty, the only bait I could procure was a bull suffering from the last stages of foot-and-mouth disease and at death's door. Pug-marks, the next morning, revealed that the tiger had come, walked around the bait, sat down in front of it, and from various scratches in the ground I could deduce that he even set about playing with it. But he never killed or even hurt the sick bull, which succumbed to the disease the next day.

Tigers will sometimes drag or carry their kills, even a very heavy animal, up and over considerable obstacles. I have used the word 'carry', for that is exactly what I mean. One rainy afternoon a tiger killed a large brown bull in the middle of a cultivated field hardly two furlongs fron Tagarthy village. He carried this animal, slung across his back with one hoof trailing along the wet ground, for nearly half a mile down hill into a jungle ravine. Another tiger dragged a large ploughing-bull to a fence, and leapt over it with the dead animal. Panthers sometimes drag their kills, such as a deer or goat, into a tree, probably to protect them against other predatory animals.

Tigers sometimes have a funny way of resting on a hot day. They will lie on their backs on the cool sand of a *nullah* under the shade of a tree, and fall asleep with all four legs up in the air. They are also fond of taking sand-baths and of rolling on dry leaves. Perhaps they do this

to scratch their backs and rid themselves of ticks. These pests are always to be found in large numbers on a tiger after it has been recently killed.

Tigers are great hunters and cover many miles a night in search of food. Moreover, they have a habit of following a specified 'beat' of territory which may extend up to a hundred miles, always repeating the same route in the same direction. This habit, as I have remarked in my earlier stories, is of considerable help in plotting the probable time of return of a man-eater to a particular locality, and the estimate is always correct to within a week or two.

It has been proved that the tiger is a comparatively recent immigrant into India, which before his arival was largely inhabited by the Asiatic lion. Then the tiger came down from the north—from Siberia and Manchuria—and the lion slowly began to lose ground before that more active animal. The tiger has slightly diminished in size and become rather richer in colouring, assuming a russet brown with black markings in place of a greyish colouration, but still with the black markings of the original immigrants. But he has not yet been able to conquer his intolerance of the heat, which forces him to drink water frequently and to lie up in cool places, often submerging himself in a pool.

As far as evidence can show, the panther, like the sloth bear is a true inhabitant of the country and has been in India from the earliest traceable times. Panthers are widely distributed throughout the world. Not only are they found in South America as thickset jaguars, but in Africa, the Middle East, Asia Minor, Persia, throughout India and Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-China, China and also Manchuria. With such a wide distribution it is to be expected that the animal will vary considerably in size, shape and habits, according to the territory. But fundamentally they all belong to the same species. Since I am concerned only with India, and in particular with South India, I can only confine my remarks to the local variety.

The panthers of India vary considerably in size and colour. Large specimens of the 'thendu' or jungle panther attain up to seven feet six inches in length and weigh upwards of 160 pounds. They have a rich, tawny coat with large rosettes and long fur, particularly below the belly, and large squarish heads. Such panthers can kill fairly big animals; for example, a well-developed domestic bull, a sambar hind, or even a pony of moderate size. Their manner of killing is the same as the tigers', in that they usually break their victims' necks rather than strangle them to death. And they begin to eat from the hindquarters, in the same way as a tiger does. Invariably these large specimens inhabit fairly forested areas.

At the other extreme we have the village or 'monkey panther', an

adult animal, rarely over five feet long and weighing around sixty pounds. They are generally of a palish yellow colour, with small rosettes, short hair and small, roundish heads. Their diet is very comprehensive, and includes a variety of small creatures such as dogs, cats, goats, fowl (both domestic and wild), rabbits, birds, lizards, and even frogs and crabs. They are found in the vicinity of villages, among rocks, and in sparse scrub though the small panther may sometimes occur in deep jungle, just as a thendu may sometimes live in scrub or on a hillock near a village.

Because of this sharp contrast, it was long contended that there were two distinct animals. That theory has now disappeared: there is only one animal, its appearance and diet varying according to its surroundings.

Black panthers occur on rare occasions. They are scarcely jet black, but rather an extreme dark brown when viewed at close range. Even at a distance, when they appear quite black, the rosette markings are still visible when light falls on them at an angle. Black panthers are not a distinct species. They are examples of melanism, and occur generally in the jungles where the rainfall is heavy and the vegetation dense. Occasionally they occur in other forests, too. A normal mother may have a litter of two or three cubs, one of which may be black. It is curious that its melanism should recur only among panthers and not tigers, but cases have been recorded of tigers that are almost white, and of sloth bears that are almost brown or even grey.

A noticeable characteristic of panthers is the way their tails vary in length. The small panthers seem to have longer tails, and the larger panthers to have shorter ones. Panthers can tolerate great heat and do not require much water. In fact, they actively dislike water. I have often observed, when looking at pug-marks, that a panther will make a considerable detour to avoid crossing even a few inches of water or mud, unless of course he has to wade a stream. Tigers have no compunction about wading or swimming and often welcome an opportunity.

In my opinion, a panther is by far the more intelligent animal. There is a definite purpose about his actions. For instance, around about 5 p.m., before the sun begins to set and the air to cool, a panther will lie prone on a rock on a hill-top, scanning the country below for prey, such as goats, sheep, dogs, etc., as they return to their villages. Seeing a likely victim, he will stealthily drop downhill by the shortest route, stalk his prey, and kill it within a matter of minutes. Of course, tigers are great hunters too; but their hunting seems to me a matter of instinct combined with wonderful skill, rather than of forethought.

A pantheress with cubs will defend them desperately. Tigresses,

surprisingly as it may seem, will sometimes desert their offspring, although I had a very uncomfortable experience once to the contrary.[3] Panthers are particularly fond of catching and eating monkeys, piglings and porcupines, although they will give an adult wild boar a very wide berth. As regards porcupines, however, at Gummalapur in the Salem district I came upon a burrow which, by the tracks in the soft sand at its entrance, was occupied by both a porcupine and a panther. This burrow was on the banks of a stream known as the Muthiyalamma Holay. I made it my job to sit in a tree immediately overlooking this spot the same evening, because I wanted to satisfy myself as to the truth. The poojarees had frequently told me that porcupines and panthers lived together, but I never quite believed these tales as I knew these creatures to be instinctive enemies. It was a comparatively lonely spot, and just before 6 p.m. out came the pantheress, an adult of average size. Later dusk fell, but it was quite dark before I heard a rattling sound, made by the quills of the porcupine, and shone the beam of my torch in time to see a large specimen emerging from the same hole, between rocks on the riverbank. Do not ask me for an explanation of this strange fellowship, for I cannot give one.

Panthers are much more versatile than tigers. They can live in fairly open country with little scrub, so long as there is shelter among rocks and boulders. They move about much more in daylight than do their larger cousins. They are also great climbers. I remember that at Muttur many year ago I shot one that had climbed to the top of a giant *muthee* tree, in which it had cornered a terrified young monkey. Panthers are also less afraid of a light, particularly if it happens to come from a lantern or other oil-lamp.

Following up a wounded panther is often more dangerous than following up a tiger, for two reasons. His colour blends with the jungle and makes him invisible until almost trodden upon, and he rarely gives a preliminary warning growl, as does a tiger. Fortunately, to offset this the panther frequently lacks the courage to charge home. He attacks vigorously, but swerves off at the last minute. Even when he pounces on a man, it is just to scratch and bite violently for a few seconds. Then he bolts. He does not stop to kill the man, as does a tiger.

There is one great difference between a man-eating tiger and a panther that has formed the same habit. Once a tiger acquires a taste for human flesh he will become a permanent addict; he will go on killing people till he is killed. A man-eating panther will never take to eating human flesh alone, nor will he depend on it; he will continue to kill and eat his normal food as well. Sometimes he will cease man-killing altogether for long periods and behave like a normal panther.

But sooner or later he will recommence his depredations against the human race. This makes him all the more dangerous and difficult to find and shoot. Even when he has shot a panther in the belief that it is the man-eater he has been after, the hunter can never be certain he has not killed just an ordinary panther, and that the culprit is still not at large. The only test is time—and the fact that no more human beings are killed in that particular area.

Panthers, living as they do, much more in contact with the human race, are far more audacious than tigers. I remember many years ago having dinner with my uncle, aunt and cousins at their home at Yercaud, on the Shevaroy Hills, while the seven cats they owned were eating from as many plates on the verandah of the bungalow. We heard an unearthly yowl from one of the cats and rushed out to see a panther leap off the verandah with one of them in its mouth. Thereupon we made a great hubbub and released the dogs. Somehow the cat escaped, but minus one hind leg. Martha, for that was the cat's name recovered from her wound and lived on three legs for many years. There are many instances of pet dogs being carried off literally from between one's feet when out walking in a jungle. And more than once I have sat in the midst of a poultry farm for a sneaking 'monkey' panther that had developed the habit of having chicken for supper several times a week.

Panthers are generally shot from *machans* when over their kills and rarely in a beat. They are too clever and too cunning to be driven, and can hide too well. This is another example of their superior intelligence. One exception to this general rule, however, is their habit of returning to a kill even after being fired at and missed. Tigers rarely do this. I have heard of another case where a panther returned to its kill where a lighted lantern had been placed a few yards away, though I was not present to witness it.

I think it is rather unfortunate on the whole that this animal is classed as 'vermin' by the government and the Forest Departments in the various states of India where, in some places, no licence is required to hunt him. Although the species is still very numerous throughout the country, I feel it deserves a better fate. The spectacle of a well-marked panther stalking through jungle dappled with sunlight and shade is even more beautiful than that of a tiger. It is the most handsome wild animal in India. The call of a panther—a guttural, sawing, rasping grunt—is heard when the male calls to his partner, and sometimes when he approaches his kill. It is a distinctive sound and remarkably loud and far-carrying for an animal of such moderate size. In the jungle, panthers exact a heavy toll of the small species of deer—spotted deer, jungle-sheep and mouse-deer—which form their staple food, together with wild sows and piglets. The larger

boars they leave severely alone. In village areas the diet is changed to include domestic goats and dogs; in some villages the dog population has been completely wiped out by an enterprising panther or two. At the Jowlagiri forest bungalow I walked out on to the verandah one night and almost stumbled over a panther that was lying there eyeing Nipper, my dog, who was asleep under the dining table. Apart from the animals listed above, panthers will kill smaller creatures and birds of all descriptions. In turn they are frequently killed and eaten by tigers, so that in a locality where the latter exist permanently, panthers are exceptionally shy and cunning and are sometimes not to be found at all. They will be tempted to rob from a tiger's kill, but while doing so are very much on the alert against the sudden return of the rightful owner. Finally, they will eat carrion and feast on carcasses in a very advanced stage of decay. I have found that tigers do not do this in southern India, nor as a rule will they return more than once to do so, for they are tremendous feeders and by that time, if undisturbed, have eaten all there is. But panthers return to their kills two and even three nights in succession.

These reminiscences would not be complete without something about that magnificent giant among wild animals, the elephant, which has been with mankind, in some form or other, from prehistoric times. There are only two distinct species of elephant in existence today, the African and the Asiatic although there are variations to each of these two main divisions. The African elephant is the larger animal, often attaining a height of twelve feet at the shoulder. In appearance he differs considerably from his Asiatic cousin. He has enormous ears for one thing, and very long and heavy tusks. His back is concave, with a distinct saddle, and he has only three toes on each hind foot. His forehead recedes sharply, and this, with his long ears, gives his head a rather pointed appearance. Even the females have tusks. But the Asiatic elephant differs in a number of ways. The largest of them reaches to no more than ten feet in height. The ears are much smaller, and the tusks are shorter and not nearly so heavy, nor so thick. In some cases the back is convex, with a slight hump, and in others relatively level. There are four toes on each hind foot. The trunk is not so ringed nor so rugged as in the African species, with a slight depression at the top between the right and left halves of the skull; there are noticeable hollows at each temple. The females never grow tusks.

As with the African variety, the Asiatic elephant also has its pigmy variety in some countries, such as Ceylon and Malaya, where both males and females are without tusks. Tuskless males, called muknas, are sometimes found among the herds of the larger variety in India, although not very common in South India. The fact that such

tuskless bulls are not necessarily alone, but live with tusked males in a normal herd, is evidence enough to counter the theory that they are a variety on their own, although there is no explanation why their tusks have never grown. Such tuskless males seem to develop into more bulky animals than do most males with normal tusks.

The idea that a 'rogue' elephant is mad is quite wrong. It is also often thought that a rogue elephant is always an elephant in a state of *musth.* Actually these terms refer to three quite different conditions affecting a male elephant. The condition of *musth* is only temporary, lasting from a few weeks to three months, and corresponds to rut among stags. It is directly connected with a state of sexual excitement, and passes away after the condition has subsided. This period of *musth* mainly attacks male elephants, during which time they are restless, quarrelsome, excitable and quick-tempered. They fight with the other bulls in the herd, who sometimes combine to expel them till the fit subsides. But this is not always so, as *musth* elephants occasionally exist in a herd on amicable terms with the others and particularly the very young calves.

An elephant in *musth* is invariably a very dangerous creature to meet. He is liable to attack without provocation and on sight. Being a natural and periodic condition in all elephants, tame males also become *musth,* and when that happens they are not put to work but are kept securely chained by their hind legs till the attack passes off, when they return to normality. The condition is a glandular one. The temples become swollen and puffed. The overflow discharges through orifices in both cheeks, situated between the temple and ear, and runs down the elephant's face as dark oily matter. There is also a seminal discharge. An animal in *musth* emits a peculiar odour because of these secretions. Many accidents have occurred and people have been killed by tame elephants when in a state of *musth.* Generally the *mahout,* or elephant-driver is the first victim.

A rogue elephant has little the matter with him. He has become a rogue because he has lost his fear of human beings and has formed the habit of pursuing and killing them without provocation. The reasons are many. To begin with, when in a state of *musth* he may have attacked people, chased them and perhaps killed a couple. This has caused him to lose his inherent fear of the human race and to realise how very helpless they really are. So he continues his habit even after the *musth* condition has long passed off. Or he may have had a fight with another elephant or elephants and been expelled from the herd. In a paroxysm of impotent fury, he may have come across some unfortunate human being, who fled at his approach, causing him to give chase and finally kill him. Thereafter he has found this an amusing pastime. Thirdly, he may have been so wounded or harried

by humans that one day he turned the tables by attacking and killing one of his molesters. Realizing from that moment that humans can be killed easily, he lost no chance in putting an end to one at every opportunity.

The 'rogue' condition in an elephant is akin to that of a tiger or panther becoming a man-eater, except that I do not know of any rogue elephant that has eaten any part of his human victim. My friend Freddie Galiffe, however, tells me that a small rogue elephant shot recently just outside the limits of the Annay Chowk Reserved Forest, and not far from his estate, had a human thigh-bone in its stomach. I have not been able to verify this for myself, but such a find, if authentic would be unique in the annals of rogue-elephant history.

A mad elephant is one that has become mentally deranged. The animal may have contracted hydrophobia through the bite of a mad dog (in which case we cannot really say that it became mentally deranged in the accepted sense of the term), or it may have fallen victim to heatstroke or overwork (in which case it is still not really mentally deranged). Personally I have never come across an instance of this sort, although I have read of such cases occurring in the stables of Indian potentates who kept elephants, and in the government *kraals* housing elephants that work in the forests.

Elephants have poor sight, but a very good sense of hearing and a truly marvellous sense of smell. For this reason, any attempt to approach a wild elephant for purposes of observation, photography or shooting, can only be made from a direction that is upwind. Otherwise a long stalk will end with the discovery that the quarry has long since decamped. It is said that wild elephant can smell each other three miles away, and a human being one mile away, if he is downwind.

Twice the circumference of the forefoot of an elephant gives its exact height at the shoulder, a fact that is always used in estimating the height of rogue elephant that have been proscribed for shooting and in identifying those shot with measurements that have been recorded previously from the tracks of the rogue. When an elephant collapses after being shot, the most certain indication that he is really dead is the protrusion of the penis to its fullest extent outside the sheath.

These animals live for well over a hundred years, and there is a case on record where an animal has reached 150 years of age. Indications of old age in an animal are generally its lanky and underfed condition (the teeth have been so worn that they cannot masticate the food, and the droppings therefore consist of undigested leaves), hollow cheeks and sunken eyes and temples, ears that are considerably turned-over at the top edges and ragged at the bottom, and a condition of hairlessness with a sallow, very-crinkled hide.

Authorities on the subject state that for the first fifteen years or so the top edges of the ears are perfectly erect. Then they begin to turn over at the rate of an inch for every thirty years of life, but I have no personal knowledge of the correctness of this assertion.

Those who have constant dealings with elephants consider them very intelligent animals, although a few hunters are inclined to disagree. Judging from their habits in the wild state, and the number of purposes to which their services can be put when tamed, they are decidedly clever and sagacious. But they have one undeniabe feature: their lack of courage, amounting to arrant cowardice, for creatures so huge. A mature wild boar, when aroused, has many times the courage. An elephant may attack a man by surprise, relying on his mighty bulk and blood-chilling, frenzied trumpeting to strike terror into the victim. But let a man stand his ground, clap, shout and wave his hands, and the elephant will invariably swerve off and bolt at the last moment. Not so the wild boar. He charges home, right to the smoking muzzle of a rifle, with several bullets in his body—unless, of course, one has already succeeded in piercing his brave heart or some other vital spot.

Many elephants suffer from a form of leucoderma: the skin becomes speckled by white patches, especially on the trunk and ears. To posses such an animal is considered very lucky, although they have an unsightly appearance. Perhaps the superstition is only a reflection of the fact that the so-called 'white' elephant are considered very important for religious purposes among Buddhists in Siam as well as in Burma.

The female elephant breeds about once in every two and a half years, while the period of gestation averages twenty months. She is fond of her calf, which makes her dangerous if encountered suddenly when her offspring is in the vicinity. I had cause to know this only too well when I took out a party of Americans working with me in Bangalore to photograph a herd of these animals. Unfortunately, the beaters who were to drive the herd along the bed of the Secret River, not far from Anchetty, in a direction that would make them pass the concealed cameramen, fell foul of a female with a calf. She promptly charged them and they broke back towards the place where the rest of us were comfortably seated, bringing the infuriated female behind them. I can assure you we all ran very, very fast that day, leaving a considerable portion of our clothing and ourselves on the thorny shrub through which we dashed. Luckily the calf could not keep up with the pace set by us and by its mother. It began to squeal at being left in the lurch and this caused the female to abandon the chase and return to her youngster. Otherwise there would have been a nasty accident, for none of us was armed, since the shooting of any elephant except a declared rogue is very strictly forbidden.

When on the march, females and their calves head the herd, tuskers bringing up the rear. It is the mothers that regulate the halting places according to the availability of grazing and water in relation to the ages of the calves. When a calf is born the whole herd delays its march for a week till the baby is strong enough to keep pace with them. Bull elephants make but little attempt to defend their young when danger threatens. On the other hand, they frequently head the line of flight. While fording a river, the mother holds her offspring before her on the surface by supporting it under the belly with her trunk. They can swim with ease for long distances. When encountering obstacles or going uphill, she frequently pushes her baby in front of her. Calves drink milk from their mothers for many months, until they are comparatively big. They do this by sucking with their mouths and not through their trunks; the mother's breasts are located immediately behind her forelegs.

Herds are constantly on the move as the grazing becomes exhausted. They drink water twice daily, just before sunset and at dawn, but enjoy water-baths as well as sand-baths at other times during the day, especially in the hot weather, if opportunities occur. They are very affectionate towards each other and solicitous of the welfare of their young at all times, and a herd behaves like one big happy family. The members are often relatives, due to constant inbreeding. I have never watched them mating, because I have never had the chance; but Poojarees have assured me that the male endeavours to cross the female only after persuading her into a depression, or on to lower ground, to facilitate his performing the act, which he does in an almost erect posture behind the female.

When digesting their food they make a variety of sounds, including a low, rumbling, thunder-like noise; a bellow resembling that made by a domestic bull, but infinitely louder, when they are contented; pig-like squeals when they are particularly happy; a short, sharp trumpeting when alarmed or attacking; and sharp rapping sound as a warning to an intruder and to alert each other. This last is made by striking the trunk against the ground while blowing air through it sharply.

Elephants even suck their fingers—represented by the tips of their trunks—when in doubt. It is amusing to watch a bewildered elephant stand with the tip of its trunk in its own mouth while wondering what to do next, for all the world like some timid little boy sucking his thumb.

Unlike deer, who shed their horns periodically to grow another pair, elephants retain their tusks for life. Should one of them break in a fight, the animal goes through the rest of its life with a damaged member. It is a mistake to think the tusks are employed for pushing

over trees; the elephant does that by placing his forehead against the bole and pushing hard while using the weight of his body. Elephants are most careful, when going downhill, not to trip or slip for fear of breaking a leg. They are very conscious of their own weight and the injuries they may incur by falling on a decline, or by placing a foot into a hole, or by stepping into a bog or mire and becoming stuck. For this reason, if a man is chased by an elephant, he has far better chance of escaping by running downhill, rather than uphill or on the level. Elephants cannot jump, either horizontally or vertically, for at no time will they trust themselves with all four feet off the ground. For that matter, they do not run in the accepted sense of the word, but use a fast shuffling stride which might reach a speed of a little over fifteen miles an hour. They can maintain this pace steadily for some miles.

A fairly good runner can outpace a pursuing elephant for a reasonable distance, but it is problematical how long he could maintain his lead, particularly when fleeing through dense or thorny jungle, among tree-trunks, clumps of bushes and especially thorns. Precious time is lost in going around such obstructions, and considerable damage is done to one's person and clothing in trying to negotiate the barrier, while the pursuing pachyderm just crashes through.

No discussion about elephants would be complete without a mention of that intriguing question: where do elephants die? A wealth of superstition and conjecture has arisen over this question in all countries in which these ponderous animals exist in their wild state. In Africa, for a long time, they believed in the existence of secret elephant cemeteries, and more than one expedition has set out to find the treasure in ivory that must be there. But none succeeded. In Ceylon, Burma, Malaya and Siam the same question is asked and the same belief is held. But no proof has been forthcoming in any of these countries.

The aborigines of southern India are divided in their beliefs in this matter. The karumbas and poojarees support the 'secret-cemetery' theory, while the Sholagas contend that elephants never die at all, which is obviously incorrect, for every living thing must die. But the former theory is equally untenable, because there is no corner of the jungles of southern India that has not been trodden by the foot of man. There are no unexplored places there.

Where then do elephants die when they grow old? In all my years of jungle-wandering, I have never come upon the carcass of an elephant that has died a natural death. I have found a small female that had been killed by a pair of tigers. And of course the Moyar valley rogue got caught in sinking-sand. But none of these endings can be described as natural death. So the question remains unanswered

and the fable continues. At most, we can conjecture or suggest a possible solution, of which there may be more than one.

Twice have I found elephant bones in the mud and ooze of the Cauvery river when the water sank abnormally during an excessively hot and dry season. One of these was a section of the spinal column. This I found at Hogenaikal. The other was a thighbone picked up at Sangam. Both these places harbour elephants and are on the banks of the Cauvery river. Do aged elephants, when they find dissolution approaching, deliberately commit suicide by drowning themselves? The idea is improbable, as they are instinctively powerful swimmers. Further the urge to live is strong in all creatures. It is possible, however, that they grow so feeble with old age as to be unable to cope with the current, and are therefore drowned by accident. This is, I think, the most likely solution of the problem, as in every country where elephants occur there are large rivers winding through the forests; they are fond of water and keep swimming across them, and at last the day comes when they are too feeble to keep themselves afloat, so they perish in the turbulent currents.

The second theory is that elephants do die in remote parts of jungle where vultures, hyaenas, wild pigs, bears, porcupines, ants, termites and fungi all combine to destroy carcass and bones completely before the advent of the next human passerby, which is very occasional because of the remoteness of the spot. This is a quite possible solution although I do not think it is the correct one. At some time or the other somebody would surely have appeared in time to find the carcass, if not the skeleton. Even the latter, except those of elephants known to have been killed, seem never to be found.

The third theory is that elephants live to such a great age—over 150 years in fact—that by the law of averages they never die natural deaths, but meet, sooner or later, with a violent end. In such circumstances as I have said, their remains are frequently found. In fact the stench given off by a decomposing elephant carcass advertises its presence for miles. The objection to this last theory is that, even so, there are extraordinarily few carcasses, skeletons and bones found even of elephants that have died unnaturally, to account for the number of these animals that must pass away each year in every country in which elephants have their habitat. This is particularly so in Africa, where there are many thousands in the wild state today, while the number of carcasses and skeletons found of creatures that have died from unnatural causes is quite disproportionate to the total number of deaths that must occur each year.

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1 See *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue.*

2 See: *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue.*
3 See: *Man-Eaters and Jungle Killers,* George Allen & Unwin

Seven

The Sulekunta Panther

The panther of sulekunta was a 'thendu', a hindustani term indicating a 'forest-living panther of large size'. It was an exceptionally big thendu at that.

I first heard of this beast through Muniappa, one of my *shikaris.* The word *shikari* means 'hunter', generally one who has made it his profession, and Muniappa was such a one in every sense of the word. In addition he was an out-and-out poacher. I use the verb 'was', because Muniappa assures me his poaching days are over. Well, that is what he says; but I for one do not believe him. Muniappa is an awful liar.

Many years ago this man was responsible for creating a man-eating tigress, which commenced her depredations at Jowlagiri in Salem district and then visited Sulekunta and other places. Well, all that is another story. [1] I just mention it to acquaint you with the fact that Muniappa had been a poacher and done his quota of mischief in days gone by. But he is nevertheless a fairly reliable *shikari* and certainly knows the jungles within a radius of ten miles of his own village of Jowlagiri like the palm of his hand.

Sulekunta is a little hamlet in the forest of the North Salem division, and lies about seven miles southeast of Jowlagiri. It boasts a varied type of jungle; heavy forest with much bamboo growth in a deep valley intersected by a stream known as the Battaiamaduvu Halla. This stream itself flows eventually in a southeasterly direction and is a tributary of a larger rivulet known as Doddahalla, which I have called the Secret river and about which I have already written.

Sulekunta hamlet is on rather raised ground, surrounded by a few fields devoted to the growing of *ragi* and *cholam* grain. Around the fields in every direction is scrub jungle. Low hills surround the area and these are very rocky, consisting in many cases of piled boulders interspersed by glades of long, barbed spear-grass. Between the patches of grass and often in dense clumps, lantana and wait-a-bit thorn grow profusely together.

The area was once abundantly stocked with peafowl which fed on the rich red plums of the cactus plant. But the Forest department introduced the cochineal insect, which feeds only on the cactus plant and destroys it. The experiment has proved outstandingly successful and the cactus is rapidly dying out, but with its diminution the plumlike fruit is becoming a rarity. Hence the peafowl have moved to

other regions, although there are a good many birds still to be found in the area. These encroach upon the fields in the mornings and evenings, from whence their plaintive cries echo across the valleys and hills. The sandalwood tree grows prolifically there, although for some reason or the other the plants in the region seem to suffer excessively from the attacks of the 'spike' insect and are mostly unhealthy.

However, to return to my story, Muniappa sent me a postcard one day, written in the Tamil vernacular, saying that a tigress had killed three head of cattle within the space of as many weeks quite close to the hamlet of Sulekunta. He invited me to come and shoot it. I cannot read Tamil, so I had the postcard translated by an Indian friend. I particularly asked him if he was certain that Muniappa had said the killer was a tigress, or might he have meant a tiger, or possibly a panther. My informant was quite definite and confirmed that Muniappa had clearly written that the killing were the work of a tigress. So I did not answer the summons, for I was not interested in hunting a tigress which was, after all, only doing her legitimate killing for food. I got my friend to reply for me in Tamil, thanking Muniappa for the information but saying I was not particularly interested.

I heard nothing more for about a month, when I received a further postcard from Muniappa, once again in Tamil. This conveyed the fact that the tigress had since killed four more head of cattle, making an average of one victim per week since her arrival in the area, and stressing that I should not fail to come and shoot it. Once again I sent a reply, stating very emphatically that I had no desire to shoot a tigress that was after all, only taking her natural food and harming nobody in the process. A fortnight later Muniappa turned up in person. He arrived just as I had finished lunch, and said he had travelled by bus, having left Jowlagiri at dawn. Considering that Jowlagiri is only about forty-three miles from Bangalore, you will have some idea of the slow rate of travel of what are known as the 'third-line bus services' in southern India. Muniappa said he had come to urge me to go after the tigress. I replied that I was scarcely interested and suggested that he shoot the animal himself. He said that he could not do so, for he had no game licence.

I answered, rather bluntly, 'You should know me better by now Munniappa. Do you think I believe you for a moment?'

Muniappa hesitated for a while, and then answered: 'It is no use trying to deceive the *dorai*. He knows very well. The fact is, my muzzle-loading gun is scarcely effective against a tigress.'

'I seem to remember that you shot a tiger with it once,' I replied, 'and that little bit of shooting started quite a big bit of trouble. Isn't that so?'[2]

He was silent for a minute and then said, 'I don't want to take another chance. This time I want to make certain the tigress is killed.'

His words awoke my curiosity. 'Why are you so interested in this tigress?' I asked.

Finally, in typical eastern fashion, and seeing that my cross-questioning had cornered him, Muniappa came out with the truth. It appeared he had borrowed a hundred rupees from one of the more influential men in his village, as he had required that money for the purchase of a good bull to draw the plough on his field. He had had two bulls previously, but one of them had died and it was essential that he made good the loss immediately, as two bulls, and not one, were required for ploughing.

The creditor had begun to press for the return of his money, but Muniappa had none. To cut a long story short, this creditor had agreed to release him from the debt if he (Muniappa) could supply a good tiger-skin, freshly shot, which the creditor in turn intended to present to another man, an official this time, in return for a special favour.

Of course Muniappa gave me details of the creditor and of the man to whom he wished to present the tiger-skin; also of the nature of the special favour. But this has no bearing on the story itself. I pleaded that I was busy and could not get leave for another month, which was a fact. But Muniappa persisted in pestering me till I compromised by agreeing to answer any summons from him that arrived after the next five weeks had elapsed, as I was fully engaged during that time. He was fairly satisfied and stated that, when this period had passed and a kill had occurred, he would arrange to have it covered by branches as protection against the vultures and would cycle the twenty-three miles from Jowlagiri to the district headquarters of Hosur, whence he would send me a telegram. Upon receipt of the mesage I would go at once by car. Pending my arrival he would return and put up the *machan,* so that all I would have to do would be to shoot the tigress when she appeared. He pleaded his cause so well that not only did he succeed in getting me to give him the bus-fare for his journey to Bangalore, but also for the return journey, as well as two rupees for the telegram that he would send and something more for himself.

Five weeks had just passed when I received the telegraphic summons. As agreed, I answered it promptly, so that about ninety minutes later I stopped the Studebaker in front of Muniappa's little house in Jowlagiri. I found him squatting at the door, awaiting my arrival. He had just got back on his bicycle from Hosur. He explained that the tigress had killed a large brown bull within a mile from Sulekunta the previous evening. A runner had brought the information as it was getting dark. Muniappa and the runner had returned to

Sulekunta by lantern-light, and he had spent the night there. At dawn he had visited the dead bull and found that the tigress had eaten almost half of it. Muniappa and his Sulekunta friends had covered the carcass with leaves. Then he had given them instructions where to erect a *machan,* after doing which he had half-run these seven miles to Jowlagiri, jumped on a bicycle, and had covered the twenty-three miles to Hosur in two hours to send me his telegram. The message had come fairly quickly and I had responded quickly too, so that it was now just after 3 p.m. and I was faced with eight miles to walk, and then had only to sit on the *machan* , which no doubt would be ready and awaiting me, and kill the tigress when she turned up. It was all that simple.

We started for Sulekunta without further ado. On the way I questioned Muniappa about the terrain where the kill had taken place. He said the bull had strayed into a belt of dense bamboos, where it had met its end. Then I asked him if he had observed any particulars about the kill itself, and whether he had found pug-marks to corroborate that the killer was a tigress.

'No,' he answered; 'I could find no pug-marks, as the area is carpeted thickly with fallen, dry and decaying bamboo leaves. Besides, there was no time for me to hunt further afield for tracks, as I had to hurry back to send the telegram. But the killer is a *pilli* (tiger) all right, for the bull's neck was broken, which is a sure sign. It must be a tigress, for the people of Sulekunta say so.'

With that illogical argument I had to be content, so we did not waste time in further conversation. With all our efforts, it took two hours to reach Sulekunta, and some more time to arrive at the dead bull. My watch showed exactly 5.30 p.m.

We removed the leaves from the carcass. As Muniappa had reported, the bull's neck had been broken and the rear half had been devoured after the entrails had been removed a few feet. All indications pointed to the handiwork of a tiger —or tigress! The myriads of fallen and died bamboo leaves precluded any hope of seeing pug-marks.

Then I turned my attention to the *machan* itself. As might have been expected, having been left by a second party to a third party to construct, the result from my point of view was far from satisfactory. To begin with, it was one of those bamboo-tr *ee-machan* affairs, by which I mean that it was constructed at the top of a clump of bamboos. Of course, that was nobody's fault, as the bull had been done to death in a belt of bamboos and there was no other tree nearby on which to tie the platform. But such *machans* have many disadvantages. Unless they are constructed very carefully and cleverly, they are apt to be very conspicuous. This one was no exception.

Every single bamboo stalk had been lopped off at the height of about fifteen feet, the cut pieces having then been shaved of their leaves and placed crossways to form the floor of the *machan*. As a result, that particular bamboo clump had an obviously beheaded appearance and clearly revealed the platform on top of it. Secondly, the crosspieces were too few and some of them were several inches apart. The whole structure looked most insecure, and I knew it would sway and creak horribly. Thirdly, no attempt had been made to camouflage it from below or from the sides. It was just a bare platform, erected at the top of an abruptly shortened clump of bamboos.

Time was running out, however, and it was too late to do anything about it. After removing the leaves from the dead bull, I scrambled onto the platform with my rifle and usual night equipment.

My worst fears were immediately confirmed. Straight away, my weight tipped one end lower than the other, so that the whole structure went askew at an angle of almost thirty degrees from the horizontal, and I felt it sway ominously. Muniappa cut a few green bamboo fronds and stuck them between the crossmembers beneath me in an attempt to conceal the structure from below. But it was a poor effort, and now that the time was almost six o'clock, nothing more could be done by way of camouflage at the four ends of the platform. Then Muniappa went away and I spent one of my worst nights ever. The bamboo pieces cut into me from below. Each time I moved, the whole structure creaked and swayed. The *machan* appeared to go still further askew with my weight and every movement I made. Hence I was forced to remain immobile for fear that the crazy structure might collapse or tip further down at one end and so steeply as to make it impossible to remain there.

Although sitting over a kill is regarded by many as an irksome and tiring ordeal, to me it has always been a source of considerable pleasure. Perhaps this is because I am, above all else, a lover of nature. Far from dragging monotonously, I have found that time passes, if anything, too quickly. I am so absorbed in the wonders of the night, be it moonlight when the soft, silvery moonbeams outline the jungle in a ghostly brilliance quite different from its appearance by day; or a dark night, with the fireflies flitting fitfully around, while the stars in the heavens twinkle serenely with a radiance sufficient to outline the surrounding bushes and landscape. There is so much to listen to, even if one cannot see the myriad forms of life that crowd the forest night. So much is there to learn, if one has only the desire and ability.

But this night was an exception in every way. It was as black as pitch, the darkness being accentuated by the heavy clouds that fled

low across the sky. But the jungle was as silent as the grave. No animal or bird voiced the faintest sound, nor did a frog croak or cricket chirp among the dark swaying aisles of bamboos.

I knew the reason for these unusual conditions. A storm was brewing. It was eight o'clock when the first harbinger of the downpour made itself felt in the bamboo grove. The wind started to blow. I could hear it coming across the tops of the bamboos, beginning as the far-off roar of a distant ocean. Eventually it reached me with the impact of a giant hand. The tops of the feathery bamboos bowed low beneath the onslaught, while the cut stems below me began to bend to the breeze. This caused the crossmembers of the platform on which I was sitting to creak and, what was worst of all, to separate increasingly. The tilt became more acute as the mutilated bamboo stems shook and tossed with each gust.

And then came the rain! Often in the jungle, especially in hilly regions, you can hear the rain falling before it reaches the ground. I heard the distant murmur as the condensing clouds began to spill their contents towards the thirsty forest below. This soon became a continuous roar as the rain struck the jungle, and the roar advanced with growing intensity as the wall of water rushed towards the spot where I sat. A final gust shook the broken bamboos below. They strained with the impact, and then a sheet of water enveloped me. Vivid flashes of forked lightning streaked earthwards, followed by the earsplitting crashes of the thunder. In a moment I was drenched.

But I had little time in which to lament my discomfort, for a still greater calamity befell me. With the next onslaught of wind the ropes holding my crazy platform either slipped or gave way, and I felt the structure heel over to an angle of forty-five degrees as I, and all my equipment, slid down the impossible slope.

I let go the rifle as I felt myself falling. I recollect hearing it clatter against the bamboo stems and then fall with a dull thud to the ground. The cut ends of the tossing bamboos sought to impale me as, sprawling awkwardly, I sought desperately for something to hold on to. One of these cut ends ripped through my shirt at the back, while another almost gouged out my eyes. I clutched fearfully at the latter, striving to push it away as it tore my forehead. And in the midst of the confusion, from below me came a series of coughing roars and the sound of a heavy body rushing through the undergrowth.

I yelled at the top of my voice while I frantically clung with both hands to the bamboo before my face. My legs and body were wedged between the stems, while my full weight was borne by both arms. In this position I held on for dear life, continuing to shout for all I was worth to drive away the tigress which I now knew was beneath me.

It was much too evident what had happend. She had returned to

the kill just as the rain came and had decided to shelter at the foot of the bamboo-clump in which my most insecure *machan* had been built. As likely as not the wind, rain, thunder and lightning had all combined to distract her attention from spotting that very obvious platform on which I was seated and which she would no doubt have seen at once had conditions been normal. But that was when the ropes holding my *machan* gave way. My rifle and other equipment had fallen all around her, while I had started floundering among the stems above.

She must have been badly frightened, and annoyed too. No wonder she had roared so terribly in strong protest. But the question was: had she run away, or was she still lurking below?

I was in complete darkness, having dropped my torch with the rifle. Also I could not hold on much longer. My hands, face and back were torn, the wet bamboo began to slip from my hands, and my legs and body slid a foot or so downwards. Then I become wedged between the stems. I was well and truly fixed, and I was helpless in every way.

As I have told you, the platform had been erected at a height of about fifteen feet from the ground. It must have tilted about two feet lower. Then I had slipped downwards at least a foot more before I became wedged. I was therefore about three feet lower than the original fifteen. My height is 5 feet 7 ½ inches. As a result my legs were hanging not more than about six feet above the ground. Of course I did not do all this mental arithmetic just then. But I did enough to realize I was in great danger should the tigress decide to attack. For any tiger could now reach me without effort, while I was held tightly among the bamboos, unarmed and in pitch darkness.

Can you blame me for shouting? I did not do so merely to frighten away the tigress. I suppose when one is really terrified, the spontaneous reaction is to shout—rather, I should say, to scream. So I continued to do just that for quite a while, most unrestrainedly and unashamedly. Then I managed to regain control of myself and began to think things out. I remembered having heard the sound of a heavy body rushing through the undergrowth. Undoubtedly, that had been the tigress. But had she rushed right away, or had she just leapt to the shelter of some other clump after bedlam had broken loose around and above her?

As I calmed down I realized with great thankfulness that the tigress was after all just a normal cattle-lifter and not a man-eater. My screams must surely have frightened her more than ever. Having reasoned thus far, I felt fairly certain she had run away and that I would be safe enough if I descended to the ground. But the point was that I could not descend, I was caught firmly between the swaying

stems.

The next few minutes were extremely harrowing ones. Finding myself held so firmly, the obvious thing to do was to draw myself higher up the stem to which I was clinging in order to free my feet and lower extremities. I started to do this while groping with the toes of my canvas shoes for the slightest foothold to support my weight, even for a few seconds, to relieve the terrible strain on my arms.

I do not know how many of you have seen or examined a bamboo stem, or frond as it is generally called, very closely. There are projections along it from which the leaves branch out. Some of them are spiked, but they are all relatively strong although only as thick as a man's middle finger. These sharp spikes pierced the thin rubber soles of the canvas shoes I was wearing and cut their way into my flesh. But they were strong enough to support my weight. With considerable effort I regained the foot or so I had lost. As I did so I felt my legs come free. Soon I was clinging to only one stem, which supported my entire weight.

While all this was happening the storm continued with unabated fury. Lightning flashed, the thunder rumbled and crashed, and the rain descended in solid sheets. The wind grew stronger, if that were possible, and tore its way through the bamboo grove, whipping off branches here and there that swished past my face as they were carried away by the breeze. Suddenly a tremendous blast, stronger than any of its predecessors, seized the tops of the bamboo. It struck the mutilated clump, causing the stems to bend further than ever, and the stem to which I clung broke sharply below me. I felt myself falling as my body crashed its way through the other stems, and a second later, still holding the broken bamboo in my hands, I hit mother earth with a resounding thump.

Instinctively I scrambled up and with my feet groped in the intense darkness for my fallen rifle. But it was quite some time before I found it, and I went twice around that clump of bamboos before I did so. I could feel the end of the muzzle clogged with mud and the first thing I did was to clean it.

I had not brought a greatcoat with me because the weather had been warm; only a pullover. This had fallen to the ground with the rest of my things and very foolishly I did not think of searching for it, a lapse for which I was to suffer intensely before that night was over.

The next thing I did was to press the button of the torch that was fastened to the barrel of my rifle. Nothing happened. I felt along the torch itself till I came to where its lens would have been, but there was neither glass nor bulb. Both had been smashed in the fall. I was in pitch-darkness. And the rain continued with unabated force.

I have mentioned that the bull had been killed about a mile from

the hamlet of Sulekunta. A mile is no great distance, but to reach that hamlet in those conditions would be tricky, for apart from the rain and darkness, I had a bamboo jungle to contend with. Those who have been in such jungles at night will understand what that means, for the bamboos grow in clusters, each cluster only a few feet from its neighbour. As a rule no trees grow between, nor large bushes either, the intervening ground being covered with grass, minor undergrowth, or just a deep carpet of fallen, decaying bamboo leaves. Even in bright daylight one clump of bamboos looks like any other, and I knew that, in pitch-darkness, intensified by the bamboos themselves, the overcast sky, the pouring rain, the absence of any star to guide me, and the impossibility of keeping a match alight even if I could strike one on the sodden box, once I left the clump on which I had been sitting, I might wander all night in circles without getting any closer to Sulekunta. I might even wander further away from the hamlet.

By this time I had ceased to worry about the tigress. If she had been anywhere near and had wanted to attack me, she would have done so already. Otherwise, no animal would venture out in a storm like that. Even wild elephants, a few of which generally inhabited these mixed jungles, where the bamboo grew to provide them with tender fronds, would not brave these elements, but would seek such shelter as they could find, huddled together beneath the clumps. Of course, it would be just too bad if I was unlucky enough to walk right into one while groping in the darkness. That was a chance that had to be taken.

I waited for the next flash of lightning, and it was not long in coming. After that momentary illumination, I faced the direction in which I judged the hamlet to be. I walked a few paces with outstretched hands that soon met the spiky obstruction caused by the next clump. I felt my way around it, and when I judged I had walked about half way around, I tried to continue in the proper direction. A few minutes of this sort of thing made me realize its utter hopelessness. To begin with, when I walked around each clump of bamboo I had no means of judging whether I had circumvented half of it, or less, or more; so that each time I set out for the next clump I might be walking in almost any direction. I then decided that there was no alternative but to wait for the storm to pass. I sat on my haunches at the foot of the next clump. The ground was about six inches deep in water and mud, so I placed my rifle across my knees and awaited events.

It was ten o'clock before the heavy rain eased, but a sharp drizzle prevailed till almost midnight. The thunder had long since ceased and the flashes of lightning became fewer and then stopped altogether, leaving me in inky blackness.

So long as it had rained heavily I had not felt the cold unduly. Paradoxically, the water had seemed comparatively warm. When the drizzle set in I felt chilly, and when after midnight the drizzle ceased, that was when I really started to feel the cold. What with the drop in temperature towards the early hours of the morning, together with evaporation from my soaked clothing, I began to freeze. In no uncertain manner I cursed myself for failing to look for my pullover. Eventually I removed every stitch of clothing, walked to and fro, leaped up and down, flung my arms and legs about, and did everything I could to keep the blood circulating in my chilled body. I tried to light a match, but the box and its contents were sodden. The sky remained overcast, without a star to guide me on another attempt to reach Sulekunta. And so I passed what was without a doubt the most uncomfortable night ever. Blue with cold and with chattering teeth, I witnessed the dawn break through the clouds of vapour that rose from the saturated jungle.

With daylight I was able to gain an idea of the general direction in which the hamlet lay and set out for it. Imagine my surprise when, scarcely a minute later, I passed the beheaded clump on which I had been sitting the night before. Although I had been tempted many times during the hours of early morning, when I felt that I would freeze to death, to blunder forth a second time, at that moment I heartily congratulated myself for having remained where I was. Eventually, wearing my still soaking trousers, I reached the little village, where I found Muniappa anxiously awaiting me.

Before telling him what had happened, I asked him to make a big fire of straw, wood, dried cow-dung—in fact, anything that would burn—without a moment's delay. Soon a healthy blaze was started and I sat close beside it, my saturated shirt spread on the ground beside me next to my pants, while I wore Muniappa's turban around my waist. It was a feeling of pure bliss that crept over me as the heat penetrated every part of my body. Then, as Muniappa placed a small pot of water in the midst of the fire, preparatory to making tea, I told him the tale of woe.

An hour later I started the seven-mile walk back to Jowlagiri and my car. I now had a personal account to settle with the tigress of Sulekunta. Although she was undoubtedly innocent of the intention, she was, I felt, responsible for the terrible night I had just endured. At Jowlagiri I left Muniappa with money for another telegram in case the tigress should kill again, when he was to inform me without delay. Then I returned to Bangalore, a sadder but a much wiser man.

The same evening I suffered a sharp attack of ague, followed by high fever. The exposure had brought on a bout of malaria. To malaria bronchitis was added three days later, and this in turn developed into

pneumonia. It was then that the telegram came from Muniappa: the tigress had killed again at Sulekunta. Of course, I could not respond. I told my wife to write to Muniappa, telling him of my condition, and that I would contact him when I was fit to answer a further summons. But it was a whole month before I felt I could risk another night in a *machan*. And that, of course, against both my wife's and the doctor's orders. Meanwhile I wrote and told Muniappa that I was well again.

Nearly another month passed before I received the next telegram. Briefly it informed me that a cow had been killed near Sulekunta. Thirsting for revenge, I set out for Jowlagiri once more, but this time with a raincoat and two pullovers, together with a spare torch, batteries, bulbs and matches, wrapped in an old oilskin tobacco pouch to protect them from the wet. I had learnt my lesson: from that time I have always carried these additional articles with me.

When Muniappa met me at Jowlagiri, he told me that the killer was a very big panther—a thendu—and not a tigress as he had imagined. He said he was certain of this because he had clearly seen the pug-marks in the sand beside the kill. To say I was very disappointed would express my feelings lightly. Then Muniappa said something that made me think deeply. He said that he now thought that there never had been a tigress, and that this thendu had alone been responsible for the many kills that had occurred at Sulekunta. He reminded me that we had seen no pug-marks near the bull over which I had sat. Both he and I had concluded the animal had been a tiger because the bull's neck had been broken and it was the villagers of Sulekunta who had said it was a tigress. He also reminded me that thendus kill and eat in the same manner as tigers.

The thought that I had been through all that dreadful ordeal for the sake of a mere panther was distinctly galling. However, having come so far, I set out with Muniappa for Sulekunta. The kill, this time a fully-grown and white cow, lay at the fringe of the same belt of bamboo. In my letter I had told Muniappa to build no more *machans* on bamboo trees. Thus I was left with selecting the spot where I intended to sit and constructing my hide in the short space of the one remaining hour of daylight. It was exactly five o'clock.

In those early days I had not made the portable *machan* which I carried about with me in later years to meet just such an emergency as this. So I had to work really fast if I wanted to be in place by six o'clock. The kill had been made at the fringe of the bamboo belt and was much closer to the hamlet. The bamboo grew less thickly there and was interspersed with a few trees and a considerable number of lantana and other bushes which had spread in from the adjacent scrub jungle.

Glancing around quickly, my eyes fell on a large lantana bush

some twently yards away. It was a few feet apart from its neighbours and seemed the ideal place. Muniappa had brought his curved knife for cutting wood, so we set to work in real earnest. From the edge of the lantana bush furthest from where the cow was lying we hacked a small passage leading to its centre, which we then cut away also, retaining for camouflage use all the branches and twigs we removed. I crawled through the passage and sat in the centre of the bush. Then, level with my head, Muniappa cut a rectangular opening directly facing the dead cow. We made the space in the middle of the bush large enough for me to sit in comfortably, together with my raincoat, pullovers and a flask of tea. Taking up my position, I aligned my rifle through the rectangular opening and at the kill to test the angle and direction of fire.

We had worked fast and it was still ten minutes to six when Muniappa, after a scrutiny from all angles to check if anything had been overlooked, pronounced himself satisfied. Then he went away. It was quite warm under the bush which, together with the earth beneath, still retained some of the heat of the day. This caused me to perspire a little, but as it grew dark this slight inconvenience passed away and I was as comfortable as I could expect.

There were the usual jungle sounds of sundown, dominated by the screeching of myriads of those small green parakeets with purple heads that abound in the vicinity of bamboo frests, where they feed voraciously on the dried bamboo seeds. Batches of the 'seven-sister' birds, which is the colloquial name for the Indian 'babbler', fluttered from bush to ground and back again, chattering vigorously, and a couple of mynas winged around the clearing, snatching at the insects that began to show up in the grass as it cooled. In this task the mynas had an active competitor in a solitary hoopoe that hopped about on the ground, raising his crest of comb-like feathers of a rich light-brown hue, and dipping it again from time to time in his pursuit of insects. As a background of sound to this nearer chorus came the distant cries of peafowl, the challenging crow of the junglecocks, and the squabbling of spurfowl; all three, together with the parakeets, are particularly fond of localities where the bamboo grows thickly, providing them with both food and dense cover in which to hide from their natural enemies—man, and the members of the cat-tribe.

At length darkness fell. Although there was no moon, the sky was completely cloudless and was soon filled with myriad stars. The starlight shed a diffused light over the ground in front of me, so that the dead cow, as I looked at it through the opening we had made in the lantana, still remained visible as a faint blur on the ground although it had lost its shape. The patches of white on its coat helped to reveal those parts of the carcass, whereas the brown patches were

nearly invisible. The minutes passed quickly enough and it was 7.45 when I thought I heard a slight sound to my right. It seemed like a faint sigh, or maybe a stifled yawn. Then, seconds later, came a faint scratching.

What could have made it? Not a panther, nor a tiger for that matter. Very likely a mongoose was nosing around. That would account for the scratching noise I had heard, but not for the faint sigh or stifled yawn. The minutes sped by and then the scratching was resumed. This time it came from behind me. Something was clawing gently at the lantana bush in which I was seated. It seemed to have discovered the freshly-cut branches and twigs that had been loosely placed there by Muniappa and was investigating; perhaps even trying to remove them. Whatever animal was busy there, it was either extraordinarily brave or exceptionally curious. I became curious too, and I turned my head slowly to glance over my left shoulder.

The scratching noise ceased abruptly. Had the animal been able to detect that slight movement, even through the intervening twigs? For a considerable time nothing happened. Then the scratching restarted, more insistently and more quickly this time. From the darkness in which I sat the leaves and twigs of the bush behind me were outlined faintly against the background of the star-dusted sky. I saw them vibrate and move. The creature now seemed to be making a determined effort to remove the loose twigs. Then I heard the faint hissing sound that is the unmistakable snarl of a panther in doubt.

Slowly I drew the rifle back from the rectangular aperture before me, and half-turned my body around. That was when the panther ceased to be in doubt or even to be curious. There came a series of quick, deep growls, followed by a rush and a thud, as the panther backed out and leapt for the shelter of some other bush or a clump of grass.

My memory flew back to that rainy night just two months earlier, when I had slid off the tilting *machan* and had almost been impaled on the lopped ends of the bamboo stems. I had heard this very same growling then, followed by the rush and thud as an animal had leapt away. I wondered if Muniappa was right. Could it have been just a panther that had been sheltering under the bamboos when I had fallen on top of it, and not a tigress—or a tiger—as I had thought?

Well, whatever animal had made its rush on that occasion, I had no doubt whatever that in this instance I was dealing with a panther—and a thendu at that. And now it had discovered my presence and had gone, and there was little chance that it would return. Luck was entirely against me. I looked at my wrist-watch; the time was 8.20. The night was still young, so I decided to wait till midnight and then return to Sulekunta.

As chance ordained, however, I had not heard the last of the thendu for that night. Obviously hungry, certainly curious, and angry at being spied upon, it came back in a half-circle and, without revealing itself, started uttering the well-known sawing call of a panther from the jungle in front of me and immediately beyond the dead cow. Panthers often make these sounds when returning to an animal they have killed, but this one had not done so up till now.

I remained quite still and the effect on that thendu was amazing. He walked around the area in a wide circle, taking care to keep out of sight, till he got behind me. Then, as if conscious that he was at an advantage, redoubled—if that was possible—his sawing, alternating with snarls. At one stage he ceased abruptly and silence reigned for a while. Either he had gone away or he was preparing to attack. But panthers, even the large thendus, do not do that sort of thing unless they have become man-eaters, and I knew this animal was no man-eater. For there had not been a single report of any person having been molested by tiger or panther in this area since the reign of the Jowlagiri man-eater. [3]

The doubt was settled a little later when he worked himself around to a direction in front of me but half-left, and from there he began to call again. This gave me the hope that if I remained absolutely still he might become bold enough to advance upon the kill, or at least show himself for a minute or two. But it turned out a futile hope. Finally, he abandoned the task of trying to terrify me with his calls and departed, his grunts of disapproval and disappointment gradually fading away in the distance.

I remained till midnight without any sign of his return, and then, deciding he had gone for good, I stepped out of my hiding place and walked the short distance to Sulekunta, where I woke up Muniappa and told him what had happened. Muniappa said that he thought I had done wrong by coming away and that I should have remained in hiding, as he was certain the panther would return in the early hours of the morning. He even suggested that I go back and re-enter the lantana bush. But I was of a different opinion, being just as confident that the thendu would not return, because, all his efforts to dislodge me having failed, he would hardly be so foolish as to come back and show himself, when I might still be concealed.

Muniappa challenged me to a bet on this issue. I accepted it and suggested a stake of five rupees—about six shillings. He said that was too high a figure, but he was prepared to bet me a rupee that the thendu would return. I accepted the challenge.

It was agreed that I should walk back to Jowlagiri alone and spend the rest of the night in the small forest rest house there, while Muniappa would remain at Sulekunta, inspect the kill early next

morning to see if the panther had come back, and then follow to Jowlagiri and report.

I spent a late morning at the Jowlagiri rest house and awoke to see Muniappa peering in at me through the iron bars of the little window which I had left open. The time was 8.30 a.m. Getting out of bed, I went out on to the verandah, where Muniappa told me he had won his bet and come to collect his money. The thendu had returned and eaten well, but he said he thought there was enough left over for a third meal. That would mean that the panther would be at the kill that very evening. Muniappa also said that he had taken the precaution of covering what remained of the carcass with leaves, in order to hide it from the vultures.

Beckoning him into the bedroom of the rest house, I solemnly handed over the stake money of one rupee and then told him I would prepare some tea for him if he would take my camp-kettle to fill at the little stone-lined well about a hundred yards behind the bungalow. He did that with alacrity, and soon the roar of my Primus stove told us both that refreshment was on the way. Without bothering to shave, I buttered some cold *chappaties* and opened a large tin of sardines to keep them company. Being a caste man, Muniappa would have nothing to do with my buttered *chappaties* and sardines, but he accepted the big mug of tea I offered him. Then we tried to chalk out a line of campaign for the forthcoming night.

Now I did not favour the idea of sitting in the bush again, for I was almost certain the panther would inspect it carefully before approaching his kill, if he did return at all. If he found me inside, which he was sure to do, he would repeat his performance of the night before. True he had come back in the early hours of the morning, as Muniappa had predicted. But I felt he would not have done so had I returned to the bush the previous night, as my henchman had suggested, or had I remained there. So a plan began to form in my mind, but I did not tell Muniappa, whose opinion it was that I should reoccupy my old hide. Instead, I told him to go to his house in the village of Jowlagiri, half a mile from the forest rest house, eat an early lunch and be prepared to return with me to Sulekunta at exactly one o'clock.

Eating a cold lunch myself, I left the bungalow at twelve thirty and walked to the village to collect Muniappa, but my retainer had not even started on his meal when I arrived. However, by dint of much cajoling, I managed to get him on the move by one-thirty in the afternoon. It was blazing hot, but we maintained a brisk pace, reaching what remained of the dead cow at exactly three-thirty. We were both streaming with perspiration. I then began to seek for the means to put my secret plan into operation. You will probably have

guessed what I was looking for: a convenient tree, overlooking the bush inside which I had sheltered the night before, quite regardless of whether the kill was visible from the tree or not.

As soon as he realized what was in my mind, Muniappa told me plainly that he did not think it a very good plan. Fancy sitting up over an empty bush! To him the whole idea was stupid. We found a tree—a half-grown *jumlum* —about thirty yards away. It commanded a fairly clear view of the lantana bush, but from it nothing could be seen of the dead cow, because the latter was at a right angle to a line drawn between the *jumlum* tree and the lantana bush. The three points represented the three corners of a right-angled triangle. That was why I had not selected the *jumlum* in the first instance in preference to the bush.

Choosing a convenient branch, I instructed Muniappa to erect a *machan* , which he did quite efficiently within a little over an hour, concealing the platform on the four sides as well as from below with leaves from the same tree. While he was busy I let him into the second phase of my secret plan, by hanging a spare khaki shirt inside the lantana bush where I had sat the night before.

It was ten minutes to five when I climbed into the *jumlum* tree and told Muniappa to wait for me at Sulekunta. He departed with a rather glum expression. Plainly he thought that I was very silly; but as he walked away he did what I had previously instructed him to do: he talked aloud to himself so that, should the panther be lurking in the vicinity, he would gain the impression that the man who had been near his kill was now going away. I sat perfectly still and silent. The next hour or so would prove whether I was right.

The sun had not set and it was quite bright when a large thendu walked gingerly out of the jungle to the right, halted some twenty paces from the bush, and stood regarding it intently. He was at right angles to me, absolutely motionless and broadside on, presenting a perfect shot—either behind the left shoulder or at the neck, as I might prefer.

Very slowly I raised my rifle, fitted the stock comfortably into my shoulder, and started to align the sights on the panther, which remained quite still, staring into the bush. What a perfect picture he presented, his gloriously spotted hide a thing of beauty! Each rosette was clearly visible. His cocked ears and slightly tilted head were ready to catch the faintest sound or movement from the bush. Only the tip of his ringed tail twitched spasmodically from side to side, registering the nervous tension which was not at all evident in his bold posture.

I had almost squeezed the trigger when I thought of the two nights of excitement and entertainment with which this animal had provided me. Was I now justified in butchering him in cold blood

when he was quite unaware of my presence, and when he had committed no crime? Twice he had had me at his mercy, but had done nothing. Now he was at mine. What was I going to do about it?

I hesitated another moment—and was lost!

Lowering my rifle, I called pleasantly to him, 'Good evening.'

He looked up at me, very startled. Then he returned my greeting. 'Wroof! Wroof!' he said, and was gone!

I listened to the familiar and always delightful calls of the birds as they went to roost, and returned to Sulekunta at about 9 p.m., with the news that the panther had not shown up. I admitted to Muniappa that I had erred greatly in not listening to him by sitting over the kill. He nodded in a superior kind of way and said rather haughtily: 'I told you so, but you would not listen to me. You thought you knew better. The next time you will do well to remember that I, Muniappa, the best *shikari* in Jowlagiri, know all about the animals of the jungle and their ways.'

It would never do to let my retainer think his *dorai* had become suddenly soft and sentimental. Better to be thought wrong, than to be considered a maudlin idiot. But I never regretted my last-moment decision to spare the life of that beautiful animal.

Incidentally, I do not know if that official did Muniappa's creditor the favour that was required of him. Probably not; because he never got the tiger's skin—nor a panther's, for that matter. But I do know this much: Muniappa never paid his debt of one hundred rupees. He told me so, many years later, blaming me for being the direct and only cause of his dishonesty, because I failed to shoot the panther and procure the pelt.

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1 See: *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue*.

2 See: *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue*.

3 See: *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue*, George Allen & Unwin, London

Eight

From Mauler to Man-Eater

THIS STORY IS THE SEQUEL TO TWO EPISODES I HAVE RECORDED IN THE earlier books of adventures. The first of these began when a tiger began to behave very strangely by mauling the graziers of the hamlet of Rajnagara, at the foot of the Dimbum escarpment in North Coimbatore district in what is now known as Madras state. The unique feature was that this tiger never bit any of its human victims nor was there any authentic proof that it had killed or eaten anybody. It merely rushed at its victim and, when close enough raised itself on its hind legs and severely mauled him with the claws of its forefeet in the region of the head, chest, back and arms. I attempted to bag this elusive animal, but failed completely.

Then the scene changed to a very much wider area of operations, varying from sixty to one hundred miles north and northeast of Rajnagara. A tiger killed and carried off a boy at another little hamlet in the jungle, called Pegepalyam. That boy was the first of several victims, some of whose remains were recovered. The bodies bore unmistakable evidence of having been severely mauled by the claws of the tiger which had attacked them, while teeth marks, other than where the flesh had been eaten, were conspicuously absent. In one case, two men who had climbed up a tree saw their companion actually being mauled by this tiger, which attacked him on two separate occasions, clawing him across the face the first time, and killing him with a blow of its paw the second time, before it carried him off.

The human remains that had been found indicated that there was apparently nothing wrong with the animal's teeth or jaws, as had at first been conjectured. For he had eaten a good meal from each, which would hardly have been possible with impaired teeth or a broken or otherwise maimed jaw.

His constant mode of assault, however, which was by clawing and striking with his forepaws and not by biting, appeared to indicate beyond doubt that this animal was none other than the earlier 'Mauler of Rajnagara' that had strayed northwards into an area of jungle far larger than his original habitat. My son Donald made two attempts to bag this beast, the first at Pegepalyam itself, and the second near the road between Lokkanhalli and Bailur, in the very area where I had encountered the Ramapuram Tiger some years before.[1] But he had met with bad luck, for on both occasions this tiger had not returned to

the remains of the human victims he had killed and over which Donald had, with the utmost difficulty, persuaded the bereaved relatives to allow him to sit.

Naturally, both Donald and I scanned the newspapers keenly for further reports of man-killing, besides receiving such reports as the Forest Department sent us from time to time. From these sources scanty news trickled through at long intervals. Human beings began to fall victim to a tiger in scattered areas and in the most remote north-eastern corners of the Kollegal taluk in North Coimbatore district, just south of the Cauvery river, which separates it from Mysore state on the northwest and the Salem district, which is a part of Madras state, on the north and east.

Two definite and authentic items of news eventually arrived. The first was a report that, while grazing her cattle, an old woman had been carried off by a tiger which never so much as touched any of the browsing herd. Her remains were never found. This happened at a cattle *patti* named Gulya. The second report was that a man grazing cattle had been attacked and mauled, but not killed, at another *patti* named Alambadi just across the Cauvery river from Salem district; in this case it was reported that the herdsman, who was standing in the midst of his cattle while the animals were feeding in the jungle looked up in time to see a tiger spring from an adjacent bush and regardless of the beasts all around, come straight at him. He yelled at the tiger, and as it came within reach he pluckily swung at it with the wooden staff he was holding. It appears that the tiger then reared up on its hind legs and severely clawed his chest and arms, knocking him down. But among the man's cattle were five buffaloes, and these animals happened to be grazing nearby. As buffaloes often do, the five of them joined together and charged the tiger, which turned tail and fled. Although severely injured the man was able to stagger back to the *patti* where there were several other herdsmen to succour him.

A *patti* is a patch of jungle which has been let by the government to a number of herdsmen for kraaling cattle at night that have been licensed to graze in the reserved forest. These animals are permitted to feed during the day in the jungle within a radius, generally, of three miles around the *patti* in any direction. The grazing period lasts for about six months out of twelve: after the monsoons and during the hot dry weather, when there is no fodder to be found near the villages. The licence costs four annas per animal for the six months, which works out to about one shilling for three head of cattle for six months. This breaks down to two-thirds of a penny per animal per month for the right to feed all day within an area approximately twenty-eight square miles.

However, to get back to our story: because the scenes of these

two incidents, and Alambadi in particular, were close to the Cauvery river, with Salem district on the other side, with reasonably good roads and communications, the news spread quicker and in greater detail, so that we heard about it in Bangalore within a month of the incidents in question. This is not a long time for such conditions and such remote areas. It was therefore reasonably certain that this tiger was not entirely devoted to man-eating. He was following the general practice of man-eating panthers, attacking human beings only when an exceptionally easy opportunity turned up or perhaps when the mood seized him. At other times he was obviously living on wild game, as there were no more than the usual number of cattle being killed in the area by tigers and panthers.

Time passed and we were beginning to forget about this tiger when reports came in quick succession that two persons had been killed and eaten at a small hamlet with the rather curious name of Bejahahai. It was reputed that the body of the first victim was never recovered, but the second was found after it had been half-devoured. This man had been badly mauled and clawed about the face and chest.

Donald agreed with me that at last we had something concrete and authentic to work upon. The elusive tiger of Pegepalyam, which we suspected to be no other than the mauler of Rajnagara, appeared to be again at work. According to the map, the hamlet of Bejahahai was situated almost 3,000 feet above sea level in a valley to the east of the highest mountain peak in Kollegal taluk, named Ponnachchi Betta or Ponachi Malai, itself nearly 5,000 feet up. Donald had long determined to shoot this tiger and solve the riddle of its strange habit of mauling its victims before killing them. So he decided to set out on a month's 'safari', as he called it, to accomplish his objective. What follows is Donald's story, as he told it to me:

After receiving reports of the two human kills that had taken place at Bejahahai, I decided at all costs to get the tiger that had been responsible, especially as I was sure it was the same beast I had tried unsuccessfully to shoot almost a year before at Pegepalyam.

There were two curious things about this tiger. The first was that he was reported to claw the people he attacked rather than bite them. The second was that he never returned to a human kill; I had already sat up for him over human bodies without success.

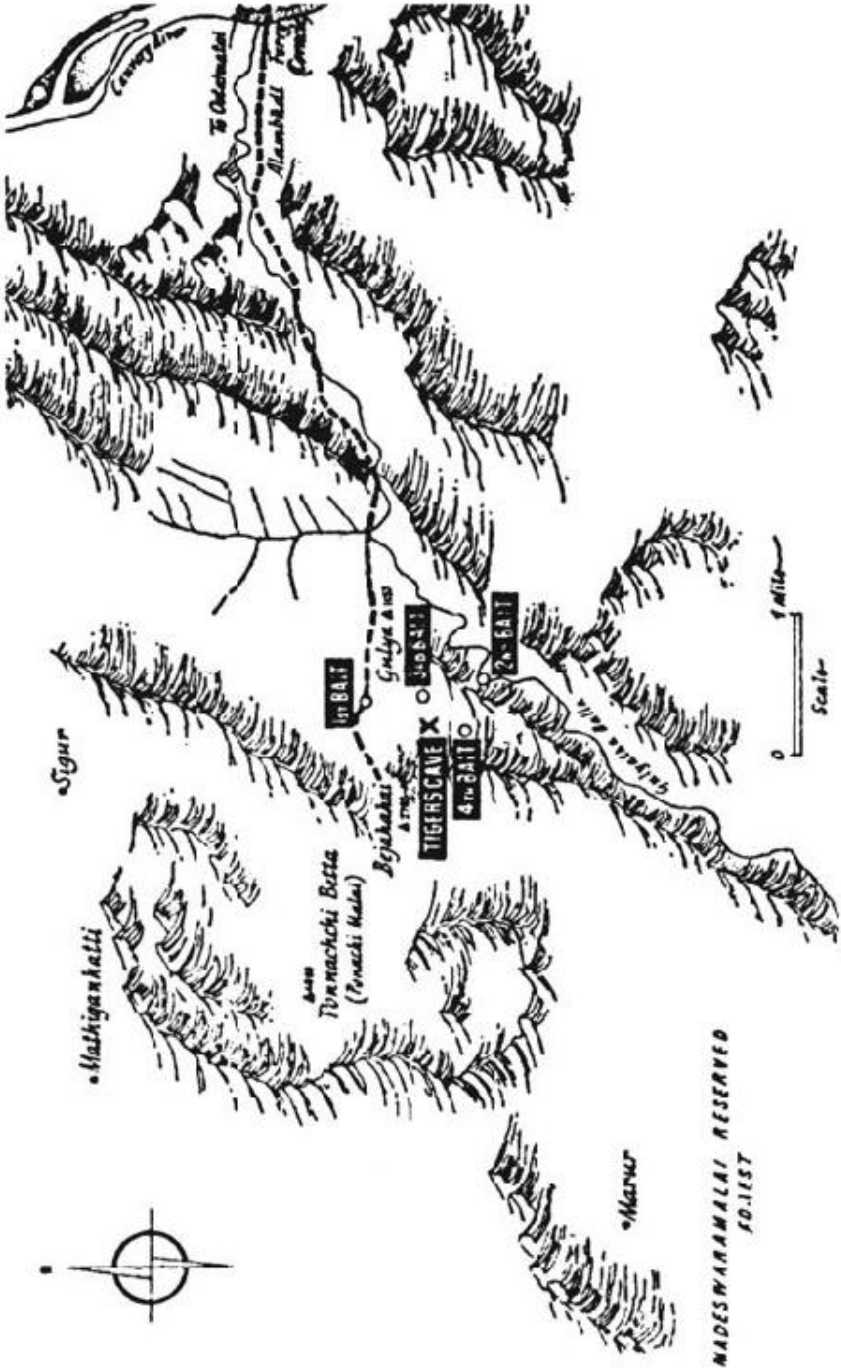
So I got things ready in a hurry and collected as much cash I could, nearly 300 rupees, to pay for my baits and general expenses while I was out on safari. Although this was a good deal of money, it was well worth spending if I could shoot this tricky animal that had proved such a menace for so long. So at five o'clock one morning I set out in my car, which although old, had proved itself over and over again as very good for jungle work.

I stopped for a couple of hours at Pennagram to pick up Dad's old *shikari,* a fellow named Ranga, whom I regarded more as an old friend than a servant. I then made a diversion down a jungle road to a place called Muttur, seven miles away in a valley on the banks of the Chinar river, where I persuaded Byra, another old *shikari* friend, to accompany me too. Byra is a Poojaree, an aborigine who was born and bred in the jungle. Dad and I have known him for many years. Although he is pretty old, I still think he is even better than Ranga when it comes to jungle knowledge and work. He is certainly a better tracker.

We motored back to Pennagram and then turned due west, to cover another ten miles to a hamlet named Hogenaikal, on the banks of the Cauvery river. There are some water-falls here which have become famous for religious reasons, at least so far as the Hindu faith is concerned. Years ago another very good *shikari* lived here, who had at one time got into trouble with the government through shooting an elephant on one of his poaching trips. He also knew me from an early age, but he was now dead. A mile from Hogenaikal is a village named Ootaimalai, where Dad has a one-roomed brick hut which he used in the old days as a camping place when game was plentiful in the area and he came regularly on hunting trips. Conditions have changed since then, however, and there is not much to shoot in the locality.

I left my car in front of his hut and in charge of the local Forest Guard. Then I distributed all the kit I had brought between Ranga, Byra and myself and we set out to cover the rest of the journey to Bejahahai, about *9* ½ miles, on foot.

First we walked three miles down the road that led northwestwards from Ootaimalai, along the banks of the Cauvery river, towards a place named Biligundlu. At the third mile there is a ferry across the river, and we had to use this to reach the Alambadi cattle *patti* on the further bank. Incidentally, this ferry is not a regular wooden boat, but a circular, basket-work affair, perhaps eight feet in diameter, covered with tough buffalo-hide and hardly drawing six inches of water. These leather-cum-basketwork jobs are known locally as coracles. They are controlled by one man with a short wooden paddle; he is highly skilled in negotiating the strong river currents and in avoiding the sharp edges of rocks that often lie just below the surface. When we set foot on the opposite bank near Alambadi we were in Kollegal taluk, which is a part of North Coimbatore district and has quite a separate Forest Department administration. Alambadi was one of the places at which this tiger had seriously mauled a man some months earlier. I tried to get more information about the animal from the herdsmen living in the *patti,* but I could gather very little.



Two facts were prominent, however. The first, that everyone was terribly scared and walked about in fear of their lives. The second, gained from those who had seen the man who had been mauled, was

that he had been severely clawed about his shoulders, chest and back, but had not been bitten anywhere. The poor fellow had since succumbed to his wounds as a result of blood poisoning.

The place for which I was bound was the hamlet named Bejahahai, on the eastern slopes of a mountain chain about ten miles in length, running almost north and south, which has its highest peak at a point named Ponachi Malai, about four miles from the northern end. A stream called Gulyatha Halla rises somewhere south of this chain and flows in a northeasterly direction, joining the Cauvery river a little north of Alambadi. There is a footpath from Alambadi to Bejahahai, which more or less follows the tributary I have just mentioned for about five miles, and then turns westwards for the remaining mile and a half to Bejahahai. The three of us set out along this footpath. It was close on three in the afternoon. The sun was really fierce, and walking along the narrow and stony track was arduous. We crossed the tributary about half-a-dozen times; it became increasingly rocky and boulder-strewn as the land rose perceptibly towards the mountain chain ahead.

Our trek was not altogether uneventful. We had practically completed the first five miles and were at the last river-crossing before the pathway left the stream to turn westwards to Bejahahai, when we came upon a herd of elephants resting from the heat beneath the shade of the *muthee* and tamarind trees that grew along both banks of the tributary. They were not feeding at the time and so we did not hear them, and as the breeze was blowing down from the hills, past them and towards us, they did not scent us. I was wearing rubber-soled boots, while Ranga and Byra were barefooted. Hence they did not hear us coming, with the result that we almost walked into their midst. Pandemonium broke loose as the elephants scented and spotted us simultaneously. As if to show how cowardly these huge beasts really are, even when in large numbers—there might have been about thirty in all—the herd rushed away headlong, the shrieks of the frightened females being exceeded by the terrified trumpeting of the tuskers. The piglike squeaking of the calves, bundling as fast as they could at their mother's heels added to the confusion. What was most amusing was that the big tuskers, whom one might expect to put up a rearguard action to protect the cows and babies, actually jostled them aside and vied with one another in showing a clean pair of heels. In a few moments, where there had been many elephants and much noise, there was nothing but a deep silence.

We reached our destination without further event at about five in the evening. Although it was a comparatively long time till sunset, the whole area was already in shade, for the sun had sunk behind the frowning ridge of the mountain chain. The actual peak of Ponachi

Malai towered to the northwest, a little over a mile away.

Bejahahai was like all jungle hamlets, and consisted of about a dozen huts clustered together. Most of them had walls of thorn and roofs of dried jungle grass, the thorns and the grass being kept together with spliced bamboos tied with lenghts of dried jungle vines. One or two of them, which were clearly 'better-class' buildings, had three foot walls of dried mud, plastered with cow dung, but with the same roofing of jungle grass. The cattle-pens which adjoined the rear of each hut had low walls of woven bamboo, topped by a stockade of thorns. The latter were necessary to keep out marauding panthers and tigers.

Our advent caused quite a stir. Two or three dozen men, wearing nothing but wisps of rag around their loins, bare-breasted women with tattered and torn sarees, and pot-bellied children, affected by enlarged spleens owing to the ever-present malarial mosquitoes, timidly stepped out of their huts or stood in the doorways to watch us suspiciously and rather fearfully. One or two of the men salaamed nervously.

We came to a stop in the centre of this group of hovels. Obviously, if I expected them to answer questions, the first thing to do was to set the inhabitants at ease. With that in view I judged that Byra would be the best person to speak. For one thing he was an aborigine himself, and these scared folk would understand him. I knew from experience that Ranga was rather haughty towards people whom he considered his social inferiors, and would call them by such disparaging names as 'jungle monkeys' and 'stupid apes'. If I spoke to them myself they would perhaps become even more nervous. Certainly they would not believe me.

I told Byra to introduce us. Never have I been so flattered as by his words. Byra said that I was a great hunter who had shot hundreds of tigers, elephants, panthers and similar insignificant creatures, and that hearing of the plight of the inhabitants of Bejahahai I had come many miles to deliver them. He said that an essential contribution from them would be all the information and help I could get. His speech was a bit long-winded, but I must say it accomplished its purpose. Smiles crept over some of the faces surrounding me. But anyway, the tension clearly eased.

I can speak Tamil and Hindustani, and understand some Kanarese. Most of my hearers were Tamil, although I could make out a few Sholagas who, like Byra, are aborigines and have inhabited the Coimbatore forests from time immemorial. So at this stage I took an active part in the proceedings by addressing the gathering in Tamil. As simply as I could, I told the people that my purpose was to rid them of the terrible menace that had come into their lives. I also told them I

was confident of success. There was but one condition: that I should receive their unstinted and active co-operation. I said that I expected every able-bodied man in the village to assist me to the utmost. My simple speech appeared to have the desired effect. Villagers in India do not applaud by clapping their hands as do the people of the West. But they do something as good, if not infinitely better. They smile, even laugh in approval. The inhabitants of Bejahahai smiled widely that evening.

Having won their goodwill, I began questioning them about the tiger. I asked if any of them had seen him, if there was anything distinctive about his methods or appearance, if he had any particular or peculiar habits or any favourite locality in which he was likely to be found. Several of the simple folk replied that they had seen the man-eater, but from their generally contradictory answers it was soon evident that either there were many different-looking tigers about the place, or that the people were saying they had seen this beast just to please me.

As one might expect, the majority proclaimed that he was an animal of colossal dimensions, with a head about two feet in diameter and a body at least twelve feet long. One or two of the women who said they had glimpsed the marauder prowling near the outskirts of the hamlet were emphatic that this was a tigress and not a tiger. But in one respect they were all in close agreement: that it would be quite useless for me to attempt to shoot the man-eater. He, or she, was protected, they were confident, by a forest goddess that sat astride the neck and accompanied the animal on its hunting forays. Indeed, they were quite sure that the goddess led the man-eater directly to each unsuspecting victim.

While this harangue went on, I noticed that one man, who squatted on the ground slightly apart and never so much as opened his mouth, wore a rather cynical smile while the rest tried to outdo one another in their wild statements. He was a middle-aged fellow, clearly a Sholaga, and wore only the briefest of loin-cloths. Thinking he might not understand the Tamil I spoke, I asked Byra to question him.

But the man interrupted by saying: 'I can understand you, *dorai,* and I shall speak as soon as these liars around us have stopped talking.'

Those words had a silencing effect and the throng ceased jabbering at once. The Sholaga then began to speak and his words were as unusual as they were dramatic.

'For one thing, *dorai,'* he said, 'the man-eater is male and not female. I know this for certain, for just three days ago, when I had climbed up a tree to catch an oodumbu that was sheltering in it, he came out of the jungle and calmly squatted down at the foot of the

tree, waiting for me to descend. I shouted at him and hurled twigs, but he only growled and glared up at me menacingly. I thought he would never go away, but towards midday, when the sun reached its zenith and the waves of heat danced above the ground, he became thirsty and suddenly walked off into the jungle. I thought it was a trick and that he would be hiding in the undergrowth, waiting for me to descend. So I remained in the tree for another two hours. Just as I was wondering what I should do, there was a great hubbub and a pack of about a dozen wild dogs chased a sambar stag into the clearing beneath my tree and tore him to bits in a few moments. Then they started feeding on the carcass. This I knew was my only chance. No tiger, not even a man-eater, will dare to show itself in the face of a pack of wild dogs. If I came down from the tree and made my escape the dogs would not harm me, while the chances were that the tiger had fled long ago.

'So I did that, *dorai.* The dogs stopped feeding, stood up, and looked at me inquiringly. But not one of them ran away. It was as if instinct told them I was unarmed and helpless and that they could kill me if they wanted. And while they were still looking at me I stole off and managed to return to the hamlet without harm, although I do admit I was terribly afraid, once I got away from the presence of the wild dogs which had actually been the means of saving my life, as I was sure the man-eater would have returned to the vicinity after slaking his thirst in one of the few remaining pools that are fast drying up in the streambed.

'Well, *dorai,* I saw the animal clearly. It is not such a big tiger as these people try to make out, but only of average size. But it has quite a long tail. I noticed that particularly, as it kept twitching it from side to side while glaring up at me. And that glance, *dorai!* I have never seen such diabolical hatred in the eyes of any living creature as I saw in the eyes of that tiger.'

'How is it that you did not return and tell the other villagers what you had seen?' I asked suspiciously.

The Sholaga remained silent for a while. Then he said: 'There is a reward for the death of this animal. I intended borrowing my uncle's muzzle-loading gun and trying to shoot it. My uncle is due back in this village the day after tomorrow. I wanted the reward, for I am a poor man. Nor would I have told you about the incident, but my stomach was turned at hearing the silly tales these villagers have been telling you.'

A murmer of anger and protest rippled through the throng, but the Sholaga continued. 'This tiger has no magic nor goddess to protect it, *dorai.* But it does have brains, much more brains than most of the people standing here. However, if the *dorai* is really in earnest and

means to shoot it, I will help him. For I have brains, too; more brains than the tiger or these folk around us.'

And that was how I made the acquaintance of Lotta the Sholaga —outspoken and unusually arrogant and self-opinionated for a simple aborigine. But as I was to find out very soon, he knew his jungle and its inhabitants intimately, and he was a tremendously brave man, too. I told him I would welcome all the assistance he could give me, whereupon, in token of agreement, he came and stood at the side of the two henchmen I had brought along with me.

As there was little more information to be gained from the inhabitants of the hamlet, I led my three followers into the jungle for about a furlong, where we squatted on the ground to work out a plan of action. By the time all this talk was at an end another forty minutes had elapsed: it was exactly 5.40 p.m. It was too late to tie out live baits, an operation which includes the complex but very essential task of selecting the most likely places in which to tether them, and the erecting of *machans* in advance, if possible, at those same places, so as not to cause a disturbance later on, should a kill have been made.

Lotta told us that the tiger's pug-marks were frequently to be seen in the morning, leading across the dry sands of the Gulyatha Halla stream, and that these tracks were invariably found just south of a hillock about 500 feet high that rose sharply from the left-hand or northwestern bank of the stream, a little over a mile away, coming from the same direction as we had that very evening. In fact, the pathway we had followed to Bejahahai, after leaving the stream, had passed this same hillock on its northern side. He told us there was a small cave near the top of the hillock in which he believed the man-eater lay up during the day. Although the whole hillock was clearly visible from the bed of the stream five hundred feet below to the southeast, Lotta said the cave itself was hidden from view by a large intervening boulder. According to him, the lower two-thirds of the hillock were covered with jungle, but the higher slopes were comparatively bare, consisting of tumbled boulders, piled on top of each other. Therefore, anyone approaching the cave would be at a disadvantage. Not only would he be visible to the tiger from above, but however silently a man might climb he was bound to make some sort of noise in negotiating the rough terrain and in jumping from boulder to boulder, or in trying to pass between them.

We asked Lotta what made him think the tiger used the cave on the hillock as a shelter. He answered that, apart from the frequency of the tracks that crossed the riverbed and seemed to come from the hill and lead back to it, he had several times heard the langur monkey's cries of alarm on the hill, generally too. Also, about four nights ago, a tiger had called from somewhere on the hillside.

Byra pointed out that none of these happenings in themselves conclusively proved that the man-eater lived on the hill, but that all the facts put together, plus the presence of the concealed cave Lotta had mentioned, suggested it might be so. The only way of settling the question was to climb the hill and investigate the cave, if possible. So we determined that early next morning we would procure two live baits and tie one of them on the streambed to the southeast of the hillock, where the tracks appeared so often, and the other on the footpath along which we had just come, and which, as I have already told you, passed the hill on the northern side. In addition, just after midday, when the sun was at its hottest, I determined to climb the hill and try to find the cave. In doing so it was possible that I might stumble across additional evidence that the tiger lived there. There was also a slim chance that I might catch a glimpse of it—perhaps even be able to get in a shot.

Daylight was fading fast by the time all this was discussed and settled, and so we withdrew to Bejahahai to camp for the night. The problem of accommodation arose. I had brought no tent with me because of the extra weight to be carried on our long march. Besides, it was the last week of March, when not only is the weather very dry but growing uncomfortably hot. Dad and I generally camp under the trees at all times except monsoons. Lotta offered us the use of his hut. It would have been rude to refuse, but as I stood at the tiny, low entrance and looked into the small, dark and rather smelly interior without ventilation of any kind, I politely but firmly said that sleep would not come to me in such a warm and enclosed place, and that I would prefer to sleep outside. Now anyone who has tried to sleep in close proximity to any hamlet in southern India will at once agree with me that it is well-nigh impossible. Not only is the ground covered with refuse and filth of every description, but it is freely used as a latrine by the inhabitants after darkness has fallen. So to avoid the refuse we walked to an open spot about 150 yards away and decided to sleep there for the night. Lotta said he would stay with us, and I lay on the ground while my three followers gathered wood and soon had a fire burning merrily.

The first item on the programme was to brew some tea, and while the water was boiling I ate a little of the cold salt beef and *chappatties* I had brought from home. Then, as I sipped the hot tea, I listened to the tales my three friends had to tell me. And indeed I was happy. The starry sky above, as it began to pale with the glow from the rising moon, the flashes of fireflies against the sombre background of jungle trees, the towering and serrated outline of the Ponnachchi Betta mountain chain to the west, the homely flickering light of our camp-fire with its slumber-inviting warmth, and the wisps of smoke

that curled and eddied and finally disappeared in the darkness—all contributed towards that happiness.

Ranga and Byra had been taught to read the time from a watch, so at eight o'clock I took off my wristwatch and handed it to Ranga, instructing him to remain awake and alert, and to feed the fire till ten-thirty. Then he was to awaken Byra whose guard-duty would extend till one. Then came my own turn, till three-thirty. Finally, I would hand over the responsibility to Lotta (who did not know how to read the time) till the dawn came at six.

I fell asleep immediately and awoke only when Byra gently shook me by the shoulder at one o'clock. I saw that the other two men were fast asleep and Byra soon joined them. The fire had died down to a few embers and there was not much wood left to keep it alive. Finally, despite the season, it became decidedly chilly. My watch passed uneventfully. An elephant trumpeted in the distance, and a sambar stag called three or four times closer by. But the calls were not of sufficient duration to indicate the passing of a carnivore. Perhaps something smaller had frightened him, for the stag soon got over his fear and fell quiet. I began to feel sleepy again and was glad when my watch showed three-thirty. I awoke Lotta, whispered to him to husband the few remaining sticks so as to keep the embers alight till dawn, and fell asleep once more.

It was past six-thirty when I awoke to find my three assistants busy with a large fire they had built, on top of which I was glad to see the kettle boiling for tea. Then we set to work in real earnest. By dint of much bargaining, I managed to hire two brown bulls for ten rupees apiece. The man who hired them made it plain that he could not sell the animals outright, since he was not their owner. The true owner lived in a faraway village and had entrusted him with some thirty-five head of cattle for grazing over a period of six months. His salary for this was three rupees a month (4s. 6d.) plus as much milk as he might want to drink. No wonder he was tempted to hire them to me for a few nights for twenty rupees, which represented almost seven months pay. But he made it clear that if either of the animals was killed I would have to pay a hundred rupees in compensation. In addition, nobody should be told he had lent the animals for bait. He would tell the owner that the bull had been killed by a tiger while grazing. No doubt the owner would fine him by stopping two or three months' pay, but as he had received a hundred rupees from me, he would make a profit of at least ninety rupees. Such is the simple logic of an otherwise honest jungle-man.

We retraced our steps along the path by which we had reached Bejahahai the previous evening, and after covering a little over a mile found ourselves just to the north of the hillock Lotta had described.

Just as he had said, more than half of the lower portion was jungle-clad, but beyond that the hill was bare of vegetation except for a few thorny bushes between the piles of boulders.

A tamarind tree beside the track provided an ideal site for the first *machan,* to be tied some fifteen feet above the ground, which is about the ideal height. We tethered one of the bulls by a foreleg to a stake driven into the ground in the middle of the path; then my companions set to work on making a *machan.* As all three of them were well skilled in jungle-craft, I did not have to tell them what to do. Indeed, the completed structure, which took about seventy-five minutes to erect, was a work of art and so well camouflaged that it was barely visible even from a distance of thirty feet.

From the tamarind tree we followed Lotta along a short cut through the jungle and reached the stream (Gulyatha Halla) within half a mile. Turning up-stream for another quarter mile, we found ourselves due southeast of the hillock and at the place which Lotta had described the evening before. His story needed no corroboration, for within a few minutes Ranga found a fresh set of tiger pug-marks leading across the sands of the tributary. Clearly the tiger that had made them the night before had descended from the hillock. A few yards away a half-grown plumfig tree provided another suitable place for the second *machan* to be tied. An hour and a half later this had been done, and we tethered the second bull to a stake driven into the bank of the stream just below the tree.

It was now past noon and the next step in our campaign was for me to climb the hillock and try to locate the cave. As far as the two live baits were concerned, there was nothing more to be done except to hope that the tiger would kill and eat one or other of them during the coming night—or the night after that.

Quite a sharp argument arose among my three retainers as to which one of them should accompany me, each of the three insisting that it was his particular duty. Ranga was very emphatic, claiming he had carried me when I was two months old and so had known me longest. Byra was equally insistent, saying that when it came to 'smelling' a tiger at close quarters, he was the most competent, and that therefore he would be of the most use to me. Lotta, although only recruited the day before, claimed that clearly he was the most eligible as he alone knew the position of the cave.

Obviously the man to take with me was Lotta, for his claim was the most justifiable. But here a tricky situation arose. The complexities of the eastern mind are somewhat difficult to fathom at times, and I well knew that, if I chose the new man to come with me, I would deeply wound the feelings, pride and affections of my two old henchmen. And to select either one of them in preference to the other,

would cause even deeper hurt to the one left behind. So I made up my mind quickly. There was nothing for it but to go alone.

I announced my decision as nonchalantly as possible and asked Lotta to indicate, from where we stood, the approximate position of the hidden cave. A renewed outburst was the result, all three proclaiming that such an undertaking was extremely dangerous. In fact, realizing my embarrassing position in having to choose between them, all three volunteered to step down to allow me to choose between the other two. But this did not make matters any easier. I still had to pick on one of the three to the detriment of the remaining two. Besides, having said I intended to climb the hill alone, to change my mind now would show that I was afraid. So I said very firmly that I had made my decision: I would go alone.

Rather sheepishly Lotta pointed out a boulder standing a few yards from the summit of the hillock, and told me that the entrance to the cave lay right behind it. He suggested that, rather than approach the cave from directly below, I would do well to climb the hill at an angle till I reached the top, and then creep along the summit till I could overlook the cave, which I ought to have no difficulty in finding if I kept the boulder as a marker.

With these instructions in mind I said no more, but crossed the stream to the opposite bank and began the ascent. The jungle that clothed the lower two-thirds of the hill effectively shielded my approach if the tiger happened to be lying near the entrance to the cave. By the same token, it hid the tiger in case he happened to be lying in the undergrowth, waiting for me to come near enough to spring upon me.

I went forward very warily, intently scanning every thicket and bush ahead. Of necessity my progress in this fashion was rather slow, so that it was some time before I saw that the undergrowth was becoming perceptibly thinner as I approached the higher part of the hill where the boulders predominated. But at last I reached it, only to find that I was now considerably worse off than when negotiating the jungle-clad area. I was clearly visible to any watcher from above. The tiger could creep down upon me, and merely by lying in wait behind one of the boulders he could pounce upon me as I drew abreast; or he could wait for me to pass and then attack from the rear. But having committed myself to the task, there was nothing for it but to go on.

Some of the boulders were quite large, being ten feet high or more. Others were small, about three feet high. In many cases it was difficult to pass between or around the smaller ones as they were jumbled together. Often I had to climb on to one and jump from it to the next. That made me very conspicuous from above. Besides, I was bound to make some noise in my movements, in spite of my rubber-

soled boots and the infinite caution I exercised. At this stage I regretted my foolhardiness and began to wish that I had brought one of my companions with me.

However, my luck held out and at last I stood on top of the hillock, almost at its right end. I had now to creep along the summit towards the other end till I came in sight of the boulder that hid the entrance to the cave. This I did, standing on tiptoe from time to time to see if I could see the boulder. But a fresh difficulty arose. From my position I could only see the top of each boulder and not its base, which was hidden from my view by the curvature of the hillside. And there were so many boulders that I had no means of identifying the one that Lotta had indicated. In this dilemma I still advanced, when quite unexpectedly the problem was solved for me.

Suddenly a large grey shape shot out from behind a rock just in front of me and bounded away. Startled out of my wits and thinking it was the tiger, I had raised my .470 to my shoulder. Then I saw that it was a solitary langur monkey. He leapt from rock to rock towards the other end of the hill and in a few moments had disappeared from view. The langur's presence seemed very reassuring. Had a tiger been in the vicinity, I knew quite well that the monkey would not have been there. More rapidly, and with less caution, I advanced towards the place where the langur had vanished.

Then a strange thing happened. The langur gave a cry of alarm; 'Har! Har! Haar!' The next instant he reappeared and came bounding back. In a series of prodigious leaps from rock to rock, he dashed past and was lost to sight behind me.

Now why had the langur called in alarm? Why had he dashed back so wildly, almost on top of me?

More cautiously I approached the spot where the monkey had reappeared. As I drew nearer to the end of the hill and could look over the edge, I caught sight of the upper half of a boulder. It came more into view as I advanced, till soon I could see it wholly, and then I knew it was the boulder that Lotta had indicated from the streambed. I was standing at that moment above the cave itself. The realization came to me in a flash. The langur had cried out and bounded back because he had probably seen the tiger lying at the entrance of the cave, or had come to realize the proximity of his age-old foe. The question that now arose was whether the tiger was outside or inside the cave, and the only way to find an answer was to go still closer.

So I crept forward, inch by inch, till I came to the edge of the hill and the land fell away sharply before my feet. Dropping to my hands and knees and craning forwards, I was at last able to see the entrance to the cave—a narrow opening in the rock, which I judged to be about five feet high and perhaps a yard wide. No tiger was to be seen. I

pondered what I should do next. I was tempted to call out or to throw down a pebble, in order to make the tiger charge out and so show himself. But I curbed myself in time. The tiger might not be at home. Moreover, stone-throwing would needlessly frighten him. He might come out from a second cave connected with the first, of which Lotta knew nothing, and then just run away to some other part of the forest, where the job of coming to grips with him would have to be started all over again. All said and done the wisest course seemed to be not to give myself away or to frighten him, but to withdraw quietly and let events—in the form of his taking one or other of the two baits—take their own course.

So, as silently as I had come, and glancing back every now and again against a surprise attack from the rear, I retraced my footsteps to the point where I had first reached the summit of the hillock, and continued down the further side till, eventually, I stood among my followers on the bed of the stream. We remained in camp that evening so as not to disturb the jungle unnecessarily and made a point of going to sleep early, although we continued to keep watch, one at a time, just as we had done the previous night. This time we took the precaution of gathering in advance a large pile of brushwood, among which were some quite big logs, so that the question of having to husband our stock should not be repeated.

Dawn found us on the way to examine our first bait— the bull we had tied on the pathway leading to the hamlet. He was well and unharmed. Nor were any pug-marks to be seen along the track. We followed the same short cut to the stream and our second bait. But that animal was also alive, but with this difference: casting around, we found that the tiger had seen him. He had come as close as fifteen yards, squatted on the streambed and closely scrutinized the animal, no doubt wondering whether he should kill it or not. And then, for some unaccountable reason, he had just walked away. His pug-marks on the soft river sand told us the story as clearly as if we had been watching him.

With nothing to do, we returned to the hamlet to find that Lotta's uncle had turned up on schedule, bringing his matchlock with him. The presence of the gun (not of the uncle) urged Lotta into action. He put before me an idea which had his definite recommendation. Rather than spend a third night in camp, doing nothing, he strongly advocated I should beg, borrow or steal two more cattle for bait and tie them at the two remaining sides of the hill which were roughly to its east and west, and that I should sit over one of them, while he did the same with his uncle's matchlock over the fourth bait. He reasoned that, as the tiger had closely approached but not taken one of the first two baits, having clearly become suspicious, it was very likely he

might do the same with baits numbers three and four if he came upon them after descending from the cave on the hillock. So Lotta suggested that I should sit over the live bait to the west, while he sat over the bait to the east. Then either of us might find a chance of shooting the tiger while he was examining the bait. Of course, if the tiger happened to kill either of these two new baits it would be all the better for us in ensuring an easy shot.

By nature I am a restless person and the idea of remaining inactive day and night while waiting in the hope that the tiger would take one of the first two baits did not appeal to me at all. Several times I had toyed with the idea of trying to flush him out of his cave, but Byra and Ranga had cautioned me against the plan in case we succeeded only in frightening the tiger away. Under these circumstances I welcomed any plan that savoured of action and immediately fell in with Lotta's idea. Entrusting him with the task of procuring two more bulls, and that quickly, I began to prepare a hasty lunch out of some of the tinned provisions I had brought with me.

Lotta succeeded more quickly than I expected and by noon turned up with a half-grown black bull and a buffalo heifer. The four of us soon set forth with Ranga and Byra carrying my greatcoat, water-bottle, sandwiches and an empty beer bottle filled with tea. There was also my torch equipment, which could be fastened to my rifle with two clamps. Lotta brought up the rear, driving the bull and the heifer.

I admit I acted rather selfishly in choosing the eastern side of the hillock in preference to the western, as suggested by Lotta, as I had reasoned the tiger was more likely to approach in this direction, since it overlooked the stream. I also selected the buffalo heifer in preference to the black bull as tigers are sometimes rather shy of a fully black animal. Secondly, having refused one of the baits last night —a bull—I hoped the tiger would not refuse a young buffalo.

Next came the task of finding a suitable place in which to sit, and this presented some difficulty as the jungle growth on the lower two-thirds of the hill consisted mainly of bushes, grass and trees that were neither high enough nor strong enough to bear my weight in a *machan.* I was soon forced to face the fact that there was no suitable spot whatever on this part of the hill, unless I was prepared to sit on the ground in a bush, which would be very hazardous.

The idea then came to me to climb a little higher, among the rocks that were piled in profusion on the upper slopes. We did so, and in a little while came across a formation that seemed to suit my purpose admirably. Two boulders, each over twelve feet high, touched a third wedged in between them and a little higher than the first two being about fifteen feet high. The three rocks were at an angle to one

another of slightly less than ninety degrees. The space in front was open and overlooked the hillside and the Gulyatha Halla rivulet below. If I sat at the base of the centre and highest of the three rocks, after getting my retainers to cut thorns and wedge them firmly into the spaces between the bases of the three rocks, I would be quite safe against attack from the rear. To get at me the tiger would have to jump on to one or other of the three rocks, which he could easily do, but even then I would not be directly visible to him owing to the curvature of the boulders. He would have to leap down into the amphitheatre in the centre first, and then turn to find and attack me, which would leave me time enough for a shot.

The only other way in which he could get at me would be to come around from the exposed area in front, where I intended to tether my buffalo heifer, at a spot about fifteen yards away. I reasoned that, even if the tiger discovered my presence and had brains enough to sneak around the outer edge of the rocks, he would find the heifer confronting him, which would be a definite deterrent. He might make up his mind to kill it; he might walk around to inspect it; but its presence would definitely confuse him and confuse his original plan of attack. Lastly, the buffalo would be visible to the tiger from the top of the hill and would serve to attract him. Of course, if he tried to creep through one or other of the spaces between the rocks, he would need to clear away the thorns and the noise would afford me ample warning.

I was therefore very pleased at my good fortune in finding such an excellent and comparatively safe hiding-place. I explained my plan to my three companions, who unanimously agreed that it was a really good one. While I sat at the entrance keeping guard over them with my rifle, they scurried a short way down the hill and came back carrying quantities of cut thorns, which they proceeded to wedge tightly into gaps at the base of the boulders. Finally they tethered the heifer by its forefoot to a stake they hammered into the earth at a spot exactly twenty paces from where I was going to sit.

It now remained to find a suitable place on the other side of the hill for Lotta to hide in with his uncle's ancient matchlock. I wanted to help in this and so, rather than walk directly across the hill from where we stood, or climb over its crest as a short cut, when in either case the tiger might see or hear us and take alarm, we descended to the base of the hill in single file and made a detour, walking along the streambed for a short distance and then through the intervening jungle, led by Lotta, before climbing the hillock again on the opposite face.

The conditions here were exactly the same as on the eastern side. There was no tree big enough for a *machan* on the lower slopes and so

we climbed higher, into the zone of the rocks and boulders. It was too much to expect to find such an ideal 'hide' as the one I had secured, and after clambering over and stumbling in between the heaped rocks, Lotta finally selected an almost flat slab of rock that was slightly higher on the end that raced the summit or the hillock. He said that this was all to the good, and that he would lie prone on top of the rock and tie the black bull in front of the higher end, from where it would be in uninterrupted view of the tiger, whose cave was around the corner or shoulder of the hill, out of sight of the flat rock and considerably higher up.

It was now about 4 p.m. and too late for us to go back to camp. The upper surface of the flat rock, being to the west of the hillock and directly exposed to the rays of the afternoon sun had become far too hot for Lotta to take up his position immediately. So we all helped in tethering the black bull, and then left Lotta with his matchlock sheltering in the shade on the lee side of his rock. He said he would climb up at about five-thirty, as soon as the rock had cooled.

Once more Ranga, Byra and I slithered down the hill, detoured through the jungle and down the bed of the stream, and came to the place where I would have to start climbing to regain the three rocks where I was going to sit. Here I parted company with my two servants, after giving them strict instructions that they should return to the hamlet and remain there till morning, when I would come back to them.

It was a few minutes after five when I got back to my hiding-place. The heifer, quite undisturbed, was resting on the ground, half asleep. The sun had already sunk below the crest of the hillock to the west, so that it was comparatively cool at the foot of the rocks and entirely in the shade, particularly as I was sitting to the east of them and had the rocks between me and the ridge of the hill over which, as I have just said, the sun had already set. There being no jungle in the immediate vicinity, hardly any sounds reached me other than the distant twittering of the hundreds of *bulbuls* that fed on the clusters of blue-black lantana berries at the foot of the hill. Lower yet was the belt of greenery which denoted the tamarind, *muthee* and *jumlum* trees bordering the stream. From that direction I heard the occasional cries of jungle fowl and spurfowl as the cock-birds sent out their evening challenges to their rivals before settling down for the night.

It grew quite dark soon after six o'clock, although I could still see the trees that grew along both banks of the stream far below me, the scrub jungle in the middle distance, and the heifer only twenty yards away. I remember comparing the scene to a picture on a cinema-screen, where the spectator in the audience sits in darkness while the screen is illuminated. But very soon that picture faded, too; and then

all around me was a dense, heavy blackness, relieved only by the few stars that twinkled directly overhead. The rocks around me seemed to shut me in from the usual and pleasant sounds of the jungle.

Then, just as my watch showed ten minutes past eight, the silence was rudely shattered by a sudden, distant, wailing scream, followed in a second or two by the deep boom of a muzzle-loading gun. Then there was complete silence till, in another half minute, a distant sambar doe, somewhere in the valley below, as startled by the sounds as I had been, began to utter her resonant cry of alarm, that echoed and re-echoed down and across the dells and the jungle-clad aisles of the forest, to fade into nothingness in the mountain fastnesses.

I sprang to my feet. Without doubt something terrible had happened to poor Lotta. The weird cry I had heard, although it had sounded inhuman, could only have come from his lips. The report of a muzzle-loader, quite distinct to experienced ears from that of a rifle or breech-loading gun, could only have emanated from the ancient musket he was carrying. The fact that the scream had come first indicated that Lotta had either been attacked or severely frightened and then had fired in self-defence. But Lotta was not the sort of man to be easily frightened.

It was doubtful whether Ranga and Byra, back at the hamlet over a mile away, would have heard the musket-shot, particularly as it came from the other side of the hill. They would certainly not have heard the scream. And I had emphatically instructed them not to leave the village. So there was but one thing to do—and at once. I would have to go to Lotta myself, and see what aid I could give him.

With the help of the torch that was clamped to my rifle I stumbled downhill through the scrub jungle to the bed of the stream, up which I ran for a short distance. I did not know the short cut leading across the belt of jungle to the spot at the foot of the hillock from where we had started climbing to reach the flat rock, for it was the Sholaga himself who had led us along that path. So I followed the only alternative, which was to cut across from the stream to the foot of the hillock towards the west, and start climbing in a half-left direction that would, sooner or later, bring me within hearing-distance of the injured man, who would answer me if he was still alive.

I felt myself trembling with excitement and nervousness as I forced myself to climb upwards through the scrub belt, flashing the beam of the torch from side to side in fear that the man-eater might ambush me at any moment. Finally the scrub peterred out and those awful rocks began. I could see the top of the hillock outlined against the starry sky and, keeping this to my half-right, I pressed forward as best I could in that difficult terrain. In a few moments, judging that I

was within earshot of Lotta, I began to call his name as loudly as I could, conscious as I did so that I might succeed in accomplishing one of two things—either in driving the man-eater away or in attracting him to me.

For quite a long while there was no answer to my calls. Then I heard a feeble groan. I stopped walking to catch the direction from which the sound had come, and shouted again: 'Lotta, where are you? Answer me, and I will come to you.'

I heard a subdued moan, followed in a few seconds by a faint cry, ' *Dorai* , I am here. I can see your light. You are going too high up the hill. Walk forward, but come a little lower.'

The voice had seemed to come from very far away, but I stumbled on Lotta within a hundred yards. He had fallen to the base of the rock on which he had been lying, but had managed to cling to his matchlock, although he could not reload it. The Sholaga had been badly clawed down his back, buttocks and thighs. Very fortunately he had not been bitten.

In a whisper he told me that the tiger had evidently seen him from somewhere on top of the hill and had worked around to the rear, while he had been lying on the sloping rock facing uphill, where we had tied the black bull. Without warning it had sprung on to the rock from behind and then had jumped on to his back and begun to claw him. Unable to turn around or point his weapon, he had just pressed his finger on the trigger. The roar of the explosion, and no doubt the flame and smoke from the black powder, had evidently frightened the beast, for it had sprung away, knocking him off the rock in doing so. Lotta had been lying at the foot of the boulder, expecting the man-eater to return at any moment, when he had seen the light from my torch and heard me calling his name. Had he fallen to the left of the rock instead of to its right, it would have come between him and me, and he would never have been able to see my light.

A closer examination by torchlight revealed that, although severely and deeply clawed, and bleeding profusely, no very serious or dangerous wound had been inflicted. The man was obviously suffering from severe shock and was in great pain, but there was no trace of a bite.

I pointed out to him that we would have to get back to the hamlet somehow, as no help would reach us till morning. At first Lotta said he could not stand, but as the effects of shock wore off I drew him to his feet; after abandoning his matchlock, which he was loth at first to do, he clung to my neck with both hands. I supported him with my left arm while I held my rifle, with the torch still alight, in my right hand. In this manner we began a nightmare journey down the hill.

With difficulty, and only after a long time, we reached the streambed, where Lotta collapsed with exhaustion. From there I carried him on my shoulders, fireman's lift fashion, and by the time we got back to the hamlet I was dead beat, while the cells of my torch, that had been burning for so long, had grown very dim.

We awoke the inhabitants and all became a bustle of excitement as hot water was prepared. I then washed the Sholaga's wounds as best I could and poured on to them raw crystals of potassium permanganate, followed by iodine. It was crude treatment, I knew, and he groaned with pain. Finally, I injected the contents of two phials of penicillin procaine, which totalled eight lakh units, into his buttocks. Dad and I always make a point of carrying a hypodermic syringe, penicillin, iodine, a sharp knife, bandages, cottonwool and other items of first aid on our *shikar* trips, to meet such emergencies.

It was past 3 a.m. when I told the headman of the hamlet that he would have to press eight able-bodied men into service early next morning to carry Lotta on a *charpoy* to the Cauvery river and, after crossing by ferry, on the Ootaimalai, from where I would take him in my car to the hospital at Pennagram.

I was falling asleep from sheer exhaustion when Byra came to me with a dramatic idea. *'Dorai,'* he said, 'let us make a last attempt to kill this tiger. After being frightened by the explosion from the muzzle-loader it has probably gone back to its cave and is hiding there. You go to sleep now. I will call you when the junglecocks begin to crow. We will go back to the stream and climb the hill as day breaks. You creep along the top till you reach the point at which the langur sprang back, overlooking the entrance to the cave. After allowing you sufficient time to get into position, I will come along the hill from one side and momentarily show myself before the cave. The tiger, provided it is inside, will probably growl first before he attacks, which he will then do by charging out. I will step back and hide flat against the rock so as not to get in the way. You shoot him through the back from above, with both barrels of your rifle. I have spoken.'

'Nonsense,' I began remonstrating, when Byra broke in: 'Go to sleep now quickly, *dorai;* you have hardly two hours in which to take some rest.'

And I was so tired that I fell asleep before I could argue.

Promptly at five Byra awoke me, and true to his promise I could hear the junglecocks crowing, although it was quite dark outside. Still undecided as to whether I was being wise or foolish, I followed him. The torch gave out long before we reached the bed of the stream. Believe it or not, although I had been most careful to check all the equipment I had brought with me from Bangalore, this most important item— extra torch batteries—had been overlooked. But I had the

utmost confidence in my old jungle friend, Byra, and so I kept behind him as we groped through the heavy belt of trees and eventually found ourselves on the dry sands of the stream. Here we sat for another half-an-hour, till dawn began to break. Then I removed the torch and the clamps from the barrel of my rifle, as these would now be a needless impediment, rechecked the rounds in the two barrels of my .470, and began to follow Byra up the hill.

When we had almost reached the top, he took me by the arm and whispered: 'You go on from here, *dorai*. Make no sound whatever. Creep along till you reach the summit. Then turn to your left and continue until you are directly above the cave. Lie down there and be ready with your finger on the trigger. I will give you plenty of time before I show myself. When you shoot, fire both barrels to make sure.'

Then, without another word he disappeared behind a boulder. With many misgivings I did as the little old man had told me. To reach the top of the hill and work my way along the ridge to the left was easy enough. But to recollect the very spot to which I had followed the langur monkey was a very different matter. Thrice I misjudged the place and, looking down from above, saw no cave. Then I remembered the rather tapering boulder that served to hide the cave-entrance from sight when standing on the streambed. At last I spotted it, and keeping it in view as a marker, soon recognized the exact place from which I had overlooked the mouth of the cave after the langur monkey had rushed back. Once more the cave was directly below me.

Now another thought began to worry me. Had Byra given me enough time to allow for the three mistakes I had made in finding the place? I had heard no sound, so nothing could have happened. Silently I lay down on the bare rock above, so that the muzzle of my rifle overhung the narrow entrance to the cave. And there I waited and waited. But still Byra did not appear.

Then abruptly, before ever I was aware of his proximity, the little man came into view from below and to the left of me. Calmly but gingerly, so as to make no sound before the right moment had come, he walked towards the narrow cave-mouth, stood before it, kicked a loose stone with his foot, and cleared his throat. Like lightning, after that, he nipped back the way he had come and disappeared from my view behind a ledge to the left.

Events followed quickly. The ground on which I lay seemed to rumble as if with an approaching earthquake as the tiger growled within the cave below me. Then he roared loudly, and the next second had dashed into view from out of the very bowels of the earth.

As the man-eater hesitated for a moment, not knowing where the man who had so impertinently disturbed his privacy had gone, my

first shot took him behind the neck. He somersaulted and fell on his back, the white of his belly turned towards me—all four legs threshing the air wildly. My second shot went through his chest.

He had hardly stopped twitching when Byra reappeared around the corner, and with hands on hips smiled up at me broadly, the smile of one whose plan of campaign has worked out to perfection. In great excitement, I slid down the rock from above, arriving in a most undignified manner, all of a heap, at Byra's feet and uncomfortably close to the tiger which we were both not quite certain was really dead. There we waited for about five minutes. Then Byra threw a stone that glanced off the animal without bringing any response. That told us what we wanted to know; the tiger was dead.

And now the moment for unlocking the secret which had puzzled Dad and me and a host of others for practically five years. Why had this tiger formed the habit of scratching and clawing, rather than biting, its human victims when it first attacked them?

The mystery was solved at last when we examined the dead animal. The whole of its nose had been blown away by an old gunshot wound, probably caused by a .12 shot-gun or perhaps a muzzle-loader, which had also shattered the bone at the bridge, extending from the nostrils to between the eyes. What must have been a ghastly and extremely painful injury had healed marvellously, but the tiger had doubtless never forgotten to associate that terrible wound with the human race, and so had taken great care to keep the organ out of the way and safe from possible harm every time he attacked a man. This could be the only explanation, as such cattle as had been killed by this tiger had been done to death in the normal manner, with teeth as well as his claws. Besides, he had eaten normally. The wound, as I could see, had healed perfectly. Therefore it was very unlikely that he still suffered pain in the act of biting. Assuredly, but for this injury, he would have remained like any normal tiger, quite harmless to the human race.

In great exultation we hurried back to the hamlet and told the good news. Lotta was loud in his congratulations. Every man, woman and child of Bejahahai turned out and climbed the hill to see the dead man-eater for themselves.

It was a joyful procession that walked back to Ootaimalai a little later, with Lotta on a *charpoy* carried by eight men, and the skin of the tiger, rolled in a bundle, on Byra's head. Although the jolting must have caused the Sholaga considerable pain he never complained or murmured once, but was garrulous in his praise of me as the slayer of the tiger, and of the little old poojaree, Byra, whose jungle cunning had brought about its end and whose fearlessness had flushed the man-eater from its den.

I felt guilty for having delayed the medical attention that would otherwise have been rendered Lotta earlier by my action in going back for the tiger. But I am glad to say he made a quick and easy recovery. Nothing Byra did could have raised him higher in my estimation. My admiration for him was at its peak. Old Ranga was a bit crestfallen that his competitor had managed to steal a march over him on this occasion. But the two of them, joined now by Lotta, are always awaiting us as faithful friends, companions and assistants, ready to serve Dad and myself at any time.

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1 See: Man-Eaters and Jungle Killers.

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KENNETH ANDERSON

Volume II

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The Black Panther of Sivanipalli

Introduction

THE FIRST FIVE CHAPTERS OF THIS BOOK ARE DEVOTED TO PANTHERS. Perhaps you may wonder why I have concentrated on panthers and not written of the other animals of the jungle too. Well, for one reason, panthers are still very common in India. Secondly, they are comparatively easy to find, inasmuch as to this day they are met within a few miles of some of the big towns. For a third reason, hunting panthers is fairly inexpensive and well within the reach of the average person's pocket. A panther will come for such bait as a dog, a goat or a donkey; whereas a tiger must be attracted by a buffalo or a bull, which costs much more.

In return, shooting panthers by the sporting method of sitting on the ground instead of in the safety of a tree *machan* offers quite as great a thrill as tiger hunting.

I have also written a chapter about tigers and other animals, and something more about snakes. Why I have included snakes is because, although a great deal has been written and is known about tigers, elephants, lions and big animals in various parts of the world, not much has been written about snakes, and most people know very little regarding them, except that in general they should be avoided. I hope I am able to throw some light upon these equally interesting creatures. Nor must the reader think for a moment that tigers, panthers, bears and elephants are the most dangerous creatures to be encountered in an Indian jungle. Far quicker, far less visible, and far more potent is the poisonous snake that lurks in a bush or in the grass.

I have also told the story of a very gallant bison and two adventures with tigers. These last two will give you an idea of the

many difficulties, hardships and disappointments involved in trying to shoot a man-eating tiger. In one case I failed completely; in the other I succeeded, but only by pure chance. I have closed with a brief account of a tiger that behaved very strangely. He is alive as I write this—and he is still an engima.

As I record these adventures, the sights and sounds of the present fade way and memories come rushing in. The blackness of the forest night with the star-filled sky above and the twinkling gems of the jungle carpet below, the myriads of fireflies that glitter together like elfin lamps amidst the dark foliage; and those other, brighter, living lights, the glowing *eyes* of a tiger, panther or bison, and the green eyes of graceful deer tripping daintily through the undergrowth, reflecting the beams of my torch as I walk beneath the whispering trees.

Come with me for the few hours it may take you to read this book into the domain of the tiger, the panther and the elephant, amidst the stupendous swaying heights and deep shade of the giant trees whose boles form the structure of this marvellous edifice. Forget the false values and ideas of what is called civilization, those imposed rules on the free and simple truths of life. Here in the jungle you will find truth, you will find peace, bliss and happiness; you will find life itself. There is no room, no time at all, for hypocrisy, for make-believe, for that which is artificial and false. You are face to face with the primitive, with that which is real, with that which is most wonderful —which is God.

If I can succeed in spiriting you away for a few moments from all that is mundane in your life, into the marvels of a tropical jungle and its excitements, where your life depends on your senses, your wits, your skill, and in the end on Providence, as you creep on the blood-trail of a wounded man-eater through dense verdure or among piled boulders, then I shall feel myself amply rewarded.

One

A Panther's Way

EVERY PANTHER DIFFERS FROM ANY OTHER PANTHER. SOME PANTHERS are very bold; others are very timid. Some are cunning to the degree of being uncanny; others appear quite foolish. I have met panthers that seemed almost to possess a sixth sense, and acted and behaved as if they could read and anticipate one's very thought. Lastly, but quite rarely, comes the panther that attacks people, and more rarely still, the one that eats them.

A man-eating beast is generally the outcome of some extraordinary circumstance. Maybe someone has wounded it, and it is unable henceforth to hunt its natural prey—other animals—easily. Therefore, through necessity it begins to eat humans, because they offer an easy prey. Or perhaps a panther has eaten a dead human body which was originally buried in a too-shallow grave and later dug up by jackals or a bear. Once having tasted human flesh, the panther often takes a liking to it. Lastly, but very rarely indeed, it may have been the cub of a man-eating mother, who taught it the habit.

Generally a panther is an inoffensive and quite harmless animal that is fearful of human beings and vanishes silently into the undergrowth at the sight or sound of them. When wounded, some show an extraordinary degree of ferocity and bravery. Others again are most cowardly and allow themselves to be followed up, or even chased like curs.

If from a hill-top you could watch a panther stalking his prey, he

would offer a most entertaining spectacle. You would see him taking advantage of every bush, of every tree-trunk, and of every stone behind which to take cover. He can flatten himself to the ground in an amazing fashion. His colouration renders him invisible, unless you have the keenest eyesight. I once watched one through a pair of binoculars and was amazed at the really wonderful sense of woodcraft the panther had. Then comes the final rush. In a couple of bounds, and with lightning speed, he reaches his prey.

With unerring aim, he seizes the throat with his powerful fangs from above and behind, so that when the animal falls to earth the panther may be on the side opposite and away from its threshing hooves, which might otherwise cause serious injury. The prey is forced to the ground and that vice-like grip never relaxes till the animal is dead. Even then, the panther retains his vicious hold while sucking the lifeblood of his victim through the deep punctures he has made in its throat.

Imagine, then, the stillness of the jungle and the stealthy coming of the panther as he approaches his kill or stalks the live bait that has been tied out for him. If you want to hunt the panther, watch very carefully: try to penetrate every bush, look into every clump of grass, be careful when you pass a rock or a boulder, gaze into hollows and ravines. For the panther may be behind any of these, or be lying in some hole in the ground. Not only your success, but even your life will depend upon your care, for you have pitted your wits against perhaps the most adept of jungle dwellers and a very dangerous killer.

One of the most difficult and exciting pastimes is to try to hunt the panther on his own terms. This is known as 'still-hunting'.

To still-hunt successfully, you must have a keen sense of the jungle, a soft tread, and an almost panther-like mind; for you are going to try to circumvent this very cunning animal at his own game. You are about to hunt him on your own feet—and remember, he is the most skilful of hunters himself.

The first thing to know is the time of the day he comes out to search for his prey. He is generally a nocturnal animal, and stalks the forest at night. You, being human, cannot see in the dark unless you are aided by a torchlight. But that would not be still-hunting. The next best time would be the late evening just before it grows dark. Then there is a chance of meeting an early panther. It is useless to go out during the day, for at that time he is resting. Besides, he does not like the hot sun.

Secondly, where are, generally speaking, the best places in which to look for him? To answer this, you should know the answer to the next question—on what does a panther normally prey in the jungle? The reply to that question is not going to be very helpful, for a

panther will eat anything that is alive, provided it is not too large to be tackled. Jungle fowl, peafowl, rabbits, monkeys, wild pigs, and any of the deer family, excepting the very large stags. Near villages, domestic pigs, dogs, goats, sheep, donkeys and average-sized cattle are his staple diet. Even a stray village cat will fill the bill, provided it is foolish enough to stray too far from the huts.

Let us suppose for the moment that we are in a jungle where the panther hunts his natural food. How does the panther go about his hunting? Remember, he has marvellous sight and acute hearing, but hardly any sense of smell. What would you do, if you were in the panther's place?

Obviously, one of two things. You would either move around silently in localities where the food is to be found, or you would hide yourself near some spot where your food is likely to come. The panther does just that.

He moves about stealthily, on padded feet, in places where he thinks the birds and animals he is seeking are likely to be, or he lies in wait for them near some water hole or salt lick that they generally visit.

If he is stalking and wants to be silent, he cannot always move in the undergrowth, or among dead leaves, for they will crackle or rustle. So he walks stealthily along footpaths, game-trails, a forest fire-line, or in the shelter of the banks of a *nullah* or a stream. Alternatively, he hides at the approaches to water, or a salt lick, where he can pounce upon his quarry as it passes by. It is in such places that you must look for him.

Further, movement on your part will attract his attention. Therefore, take a walk around the jungle in the daytime and see if you can discover pug-marks—not just a stray set of pugs, but a series of marks, old and new. When you have found them, you will know you have hit upon a well-used panther trail. Try to select a point where two or more such trails meet or cross, or a spot where such a trail or a fire-line crosses a stream.

When you have found it, return the same evening and hide yourself behind a convenient tree-trunk or bush; and then, whatever you do, sit perfectly still while keeping a sharp lookout along the *paths* or sections of fire-line or streambed that are in view. If you are lucky, you may see a hunting panther walking along one of these, perhaps looking up now and again into the trees in search of a monkey or one of the larger jungle birds. It goes without saying, of course, that in such vigils you might also spot a tiger, an elephant, or one of the several deer species.

But let us continue to suppose for the moment that you are only after a panther. If you can locate a jungle pool or a salt lick, it would

be convenient to lie down under some cover beside it, or behind an ant-hill, if available. You will derive much entertainment in observing the various denizens of the forest as they visit such a rendezvous. Don't be too surprised if, after a time, you notice a panther or tiger taking up a somewhat similar position to your own, although I may warn you that it will be very hard for you to become aware of them, so silently do they move. As I have already said, such places are favoured by carnivora when lying in wait for their natural food.

I remember that I was once lying in the grass behind the trunk of a tree overlooking a salt lick formed in a corner of a shallow ravine. Earlier examination had shown that spotted deer and sambar visited this salt lick in large numbers. It was growing dusk when the faintest of rustles a little behind me caused me to turn my head slowly and glance back. There I saw a panther regarding me with very evident surprise. Seeing he was discovered, he stood up and half-turned around with the intention of getting away. Then he looked back at me once again, as much as to say, 'Can't you get the hell out of here?' Finally he moved off.

It is fascinating to watch one of these animals with her cubs, or a tigress with hers. The solicitude of the mother is very noticeable. Carnivora do not bring their cubs out of the cave where they are born until old enough to walk stably and understand the rudiments of hunting. Till such time, they are sheltered carefully in the cave. When very young, they are fed entirely on milk. When they grow a little older, the mother begins to feed them on raw meat which first she herself eats and partially digests, and then vomits out for the cubs to feed on. As the cubs themselves become able to digest stronger meat, the mother brings her kills to the cave—perhaps a jungle fowl or peafowl, and as time passes, small animals, increasing to the leg of deer, or perhaps a deer itself.

Cubs are very greedy and if left to themselves will overeat and make themselves ill. I have kept a number of panther and tiger cubs, and have found the former particularly prone to gastritis. They will stuff themselves by gobbling chunks of raw meat, and will drink bowls of blood, till almost unable to move. Once they are attacked by gastritis, the malady proves practically incurable, and they die in three or four days in great agony. This complaint seems to affect them until they are about eight months old, and I have lost quite a few by it.

In the wild state, a mother appears to know this instinctively and gives her young just enough to eat, supplementing raw meat with natural milk till the cubs are quite big and start to bite and scratch her while she is suckling them.

If danger threatens the cave, in the form of intruding human

beings or the male of the species, which is rather fond of eating his young, she will move them to a safer abode. This she does by carrying them in her mouth by the scruff of the neck, one at a time.

When the cubs are old enough to walk, the mother takes them out for education in the art of stalking and killing for themselves. This is quite a lengthy process. She begins by killing the prey herself, while the cubs hide in the undergrowth. Then she calls them with a series of guttural mewing-like sounds, allowing them to romp over the dead animal, bite it and get the taste of a fresh kill and warm blood. The ferocious sounds emitted by the cubs when doing this are quite amusing to hear. They bolster up their courage and lash themselves into a fury, growling and snapping at each other and even at their mother.

The next lesson starts when she only half-kills the prey, or hamstrings it, allowing the youngsters to finish the task as best they can. This they begin doing by attacking the throat and biting the animal to death—a very cruel process.

Education in the art of killing goes much farther in the case of tiger cubs than in that of panthers. Panthers choke their victims to death by gripping the throat and hanging on, whereas the tiger very scientifically breaks the neck. Hence tiger cubs take much longer to teach, and it is a common occurrence for a tigress to kill four or five cattle in a herd while teaching her young which, equally often if left to themselves, make a mess of the job by merely biting or mauling an animal, which eventually escapes.

I have mentioned that a tiger is a very scientific and neat killer. He generally leaps half across the back of his quarry, bending over and seizing the throat on its other side, while hanging on with his forepaws in a powerful shoulder-grip. Then he wrenches upwards and backwards in a swift, violent jerk which topples the animal over. It is the combined weights of the quarry and the tiger, coupled with the sudden mighty twist of the neck, that breaks the victim's neck.

When a mother tiger or panther comes out on the hunting trail with her young, they follow behind, copying every action of the parent and sinking to the ground or behind the cover exactly as she does. At such times it is dangerous to be too near a tigress. She is liable to attack you in defence of her young. A pantheress is less likely to attack, although she will demonstrate by growling ferociously. Even so, one never can tell, and it is wise to have your rifle ready when a family procession comes into view.

But whatever you do, and unless utterly unavoidable and in self-defence, please do not shoot the mother, be it panther or tiger, for if you do the cubs will invariably escape into the jungle where they may starve to death, or if they are big enough they may develop into man-

eaters. You should remember they have not yet learned properly the art of killing their natural food, other animals. If you interrupt their education at this stage they may, by force of circumstances which you have created, turn to killing human beings to appease their hunger. Bear in mind always that a human being is much easier to stalk, attack and kill than any of the larger animals.

An interesting period to indulge in this pastime of stalking is during the Indian winter—that is, the months of November, December and January—for then is the mating season of both these species of carnivora.

Of course, you should remember that these animals are mostly active during the night, and that there is only an off-chance of hearing or seeing them towards dusk. It is thrilling to listen to the sound of a tigress calling her mate, and one can almost detect the note of impatience in her summons. I should warn you, however, that tigers are definitely dangerous during this season, particularly when courting the female, or in the act of mating. Their method is exceedingly rough, both the tiger and tigress often biting and scratching each other freely.

You may have observed the strange behaviour of domestic cats during mating. Multiply this many, many times, and you will have some idea of the savagery of tigers when making love. They lash themselves into a frenzy and a fury, and woe betide a human who intrudes upon their privacy at this time of sexual excitement. The tigress has the reputation of being even more excitable and consequently more dangerous than the tiger at this period. A tigress on heat, calling lustily, has often stopped forest operations and bullock-cart traffic through the jungle over large areas.

Panthers are much the same in this respect, but generally lack the courage to attack a human intruder, although they will demonstrate in no uncertain manner.

A panther resembles a cat more closely than does a tiger. The scratching up of sand or dead leaves by the side of a game-track reveals where a panther has answered the call of nature and then covered up the excreta, exactly in the same way as a domestic cat. A tiger, however, will not bother to do this, but leaves it exposed in the manner of a dog. The excreta, in both cases, consists mostly of the undigested hair of the last kill.

The hyaena, which is a carrion eater, swallows bones and all complete. So the droppings of this animal are easily recognisable as hard, white lumps of semi-digested bones. The track of a hyaena is identifiable in the great difference between the size of the fore and hind-paws; the forepaws are much larger.

Panthers, like tigers, retract their claws when walking, so that the

difference between a panther's pug-marks and those of a hyaena, which are about the same in size, is that the 'ball' of the panther's pug is much larger than the hyaena's, while the points of the claws do not show at all. The hyaena, being unable to retract its claws, leaves their imprint clearly on the ground.

In the past there has been much controversy between those sportsmen who have claimed that the panther and the leopard are two entirely different species of animal and those who have said that they are one and the same. This argument has died out with modern times, when it has been recognized that they are indeed one and the same. Difference in environment and diet has caused some animals to grow to a much larger size than others. The forest-dwelling panther, with his richer diet of game-animals, generally grow, much bigger and has a darker and thicker coat than the panther that lives near villages, where his food is restricted to dogs and goats. Also, living among rocks and boulders as the latter generally does, his coat is paler, and the hair short and coarse. Incidentally, the darker coat of the forest-dwelling panther helps to camoulflage him very effectively against the dense vegetation of the jungle, while the paler coat of the 'village panther', as he is sometimes called, makes it very difficult to detect him among the rocks where he lives.

Very occasionally, however, there are exceptions in both cases, and Nature appears unaccountably to break her own rule. I have shot some very large panthers living near villages and far from the regular jungle, possessing dark rich coats of hair, and some quite small ones within the forest with pale coats.

Much the same applies to tigers. Those that have accustomed themselves to eating cattle become heavy and fat, while the true game-killers are sleek and muscular, carrying no fat at all, for they have a far more strenuous time hunting wild game than does the cattle-lifter, which procures its prey with little or no effort. Strenuous exercise reduces fat, not only in human beings, but in tigers also.

Man-eaters of both species are distinct anomalies and the products of unnatural circumstances, some of which have been mentioned already.

Panthers can climb quite well and they sometimes ascend trees after monkeys, or to escape when pursued by wild dogs. Tigers do not, although I have known one in the Mysore Zoological Gardens that has accustomed itself to climbing quite high and lying on a platform that had been specially built for it on a tree within its enclosure. This is an instance of the fact that tigers, like human beings, as individuals differ from one another.

Both panthers and tigers hunt monkeys by a quite unique method. Jungle monkeys are very vigilant and keep a sharp lookout for

carnivora, which are their natural enemies. At the sound or sight of any of these animals they climb to the topmost branches, where they are safe. Knowing this, panthers and tigers charge at the foot of the tree up which the monkeys have climbed, uttering a series of terrific growls and roars. These fearsome sounds quite unnerve the poor monkeys, which, instead of remaining on their perches where they are safe, attempt to leap to the next tree; or, if that is too far away, jump to the ground from enormous heights with the intention of making a run to climb another tree. In this process some of them injure themselves or are stunned, and fall easy victims to the clever hunter.

One of the most intelligent animals, if not the most intelligent, in the Indian jungle is the wild dog. *Shikaris* of earlier days have variously given this place to the wild elephant, tiger and panther, but if you have studied the habits of the wild dog you may be inclined to disagree with them. When hunting deer they send out 'flankers', which run ahead of the quarry and ambush it later. In large packs of thirty or more, these animals are fearless hunters, and will ring, attack and kill any tiger or panther by literally tearing it to bits, despite the number of casualties they may suffer in the process.

Particularly in the forests of Chittoor District, in the former Presidency of Madras, they have earned quite a reputation for this, and I know of at least three instances where a very gory battle had been waged, resulting eventually in the tiger being torn to shreds, but not before he had killed a half-dozen of the dogs and maimed many others. I have never come across a panther destroyed in this fashion because, as I have said before, of their ability to escape by climbing trees.

The tiger takes to water and will swim across large rivers freely. Especially in hot weather, he is very fond, during the midday hours, of taking his siesta by the banks of a shady stream or pool, sometimes lying in the water itself. He hunts freely on rainy days, and his pug-marks are often seen in the morning after a night of pouring rain. This is not so with the panther. A true cat in every respect, he detests water, abhors rain, and is not given to swimming, although he can do so in emergencies, such as to escape from a pack of wild dogs.

The tiger was originally an immigrant into India from the colder regions of Mongolia. Hence his liking for cool spots in which to shelter from the heat. The panther is a true native of India and of the tropics.

Tigers very occasionally mimic the calls of sambar, obviously to attract and ambush them. Such mimicry is heard very rarely and only in forests where deer are plentiful. Panthers, however, do not follow this practice but rely entirely on their silent stalking, their ability to flatten themselves to the ground and hide in incredibly small places, and their final quick rush upon their quarry.

It was often said by the sportsmen of the past that the tiger is a 'gentleman' while the panther is a 'bounder'. I think these sayings have gained popularity from the experiences some of those hardy, old stalwarts have gained while following wounded animals of both species with their old-fashioned guns, frequently muzzle-loaders. Hats off to them, indeed. Ill-armed and awkwardly clad in the fashions of those days, wearing heavy boots and cumbersomely thick solar topees, they followed a wounded animal fearlessly on foot. How different from the modern 'hunter' who shoots at night from the safety of a motorcar, the lights of which dazzle the poor animal and give it not the ghost of a chance!

A wounded tiger generally betrays his whereabouts by growling as his pursuer approaches, but a wounded panther often lies silent and concealed, and attacks the hunter from behind, when he has passed. Hence there seems to be some justification for those who labelled the panther a 'bounder'. Actually, a tiger is generally far braver and certainly much more formidable, and when he attacks to kill he finishes that job very thoroughly. A panther, however—unless he is a man-eater—will maul his pursuer and then escape rather than kill him outright.

Panthers gnaw at the bones of their kills, even when they are in a very far advanced state of decomposition. As a rule, tigers do not visit their kills after the second day. For one thing, they eat much more and so have finished all there is to eat, after two or three meals. Also, on the whole, they are cleaner feeders. Decomposed flesh becomes embedded beneath the claws of both species. This breeds dangerous germs, and it is the scratches inflicted by these animals, more than their bites, that lead to blood-poisoning. Tigers are very conscious of this foreign matter under their claws, and clean them, in addition to sharpening them, by scratching upon the soft bark of certain trees. Panthers do this very rarely, so that their claws are generally more infected. Trees bearing such claw-marks at the height of six or seven feet, where a tiger has reared up on his hind legs and cleaned the claws of his forepaws, are a happy sign to the hunter of the presence of his quarry.

In other ways also, the tiger is a much cleaner feeder. Whereas a panther starts his meal by burrowing into his kill from the stomach end, and soon has the stomach, entrails, offal and so on, all mixed up with the meat of his kill, the tiger makes a vent near the anus into which he inserts his paw and removes the intestines and stomach, dragging them about ten feet away before he begins to eat a clean meal. To facilitate this procedure, he often removes the tail of the animal by biting it off near the root. The larger type of panthers found in forests occasionally do the same thing, but never the normal and

smaller beasts, which soon get themselves mixed up in a repast in which the guts and excreta are all included.

The cave or den of a tigress and her cubs is very cleanly kept compared with that occupied by a family of panthers, and seems conspicuously free of bones and other waste matter which is almost always present where panthers live.

Apart from the mating season, tigers advertise their presence in a jungle much more than panthers do. The tribes of aborigines living in the forests of India will confirm this and will tell you the rough direction of the trails generally followed by tigers while out hunting. Their melodious, deep-throated and long-drawn moaning call, terminating in that never-to-be-forgotten 'oo-oo-ongh' that reverberates down the aisles of the valleys and across the wooded glens of the jungle in the stygian darkness beneath the giant forest trees, or in the phosphorescent moonlight, is music to the jungle-lover's ears. The harsher but less distance-carrying call of the panther, very closely resembling a man sawing wood, that occasionally penetrates the still darkness of the jungle night, is much less frequently heard.

Another habit peculiar to the tiger is his way of following a particular beat on his hunting expeditions. This may extend for miles and miles, maybe a hundred miles; but it invariably follows the same course; perhaps the bed of a certain dry *nullah*, along the banks of a river or stream, through some wooded valley or the shoulder of a hill. On a favourite trail you may find the pug-marks of the hunting tiger, imprinted in the powdery dust; and, once having found them, be sure you will find them again. Some days may pass, extending into weeks, a month, or perhaps longer, depending on the distance covered by his beat; but you may be almost certain that the tiger will pass that way again. He rarely returns by the route he has gone, but works around in an enormous circle, coming back to the place where you found his pug-marks and going on in the same direction once more.

While on his beat, if he is successful in killing an animal, the tiger will remain in the vicinity for a couple of days till he demolishes it, when he will resume his itinerary.

It is important to bear this peculiar habit in mind when trying to anticipate the movements of a man-eater, for he will always return to the same locality within a roughly calculable number of days, depending upon the stretch of territory covered by his beat. You may come to know the number of days and the line of his beat approximately by plotting on a map the human kills he has made, and the dates on which he has made them, followed by some very elementary mental arithmetic.

A panther never seems to follow any such pattern, but is here,

there and everywhere. Like looking for the 'elusive Pimpernel', this habit of appearing anywhere and disappearing just as abruptly, makes the movements of a man-eating panther almost impossible to anticipate or forecast. He will turn up quite unexpectedly to claim his human victim, at a time and place very far from that predicted by the most experienced and astute of *shikaris*.

In this chapter I have tried to give you some hints on 'still-hunting', as well as telling you about some of the habits and peculiarities of the larger carnivora. I have deliberately abstained from recounting instances of animals shot by me on such occasions, as I feel they may not interest you much. After all, the fun of the game lies in pitting your skill, woodcraft, endurance and cunning against that of these animals and in beating them at their own game, rather than in merely killing them. In fact, I would very strongly advocate that you carry a camera along with you, and I would ask you to confine yourself to taking photographs of these very beautiful creatures in preference to shooting them. Take your rifle with you by all means, as a protection in emergencies; but try to abstain from needless killing if you can resist the temptation.

Remember always that a good, cleverly-taken photograph is a far more meritorious and commendable achievement than any stuffed trophy hanging on the wall or decorating the floor of your drawing-room. With the first you can view the animal as often as you wish in all the beauty of its living grace and strength; whereas a stuffed trophy, like a cast cocoon or broken eggshell, is just the husk of a once-beautiful animal which sooner or later will deteriorate and be destroyed by time and insects.

Two

The Man-eating Panther of the Yellagiri Hills

IT WAS MID-AFTERNOON. THE TROPICAL SUN BLAZED OVERHEAD, A veritable ball of fire. The jungle lay still and silent under its scorching spell. Even the birds and monkeys that had chattered all morning were now quiet, lulled to sleep in the torpid air.

Beneath the dark shadows of the forest trees some relief was to be found from the golden glare, even though the shadows themselves throbbed and pulsated in that temperature. Not the least movement of the air stirred the fallen leaves that thickly carpeted the jungle floor, forming Nature's own luscious blanket of crisp yellow-brown tints. When the monsoons set in, these same crisp leaves would be converted into mouldering manure, which in course of time would serve to feed other forest trees, long after the jungle giants from which they have fallen had themselves crashed to earth.

The heavy stillness was occasionally broken by a hollow sound from the wooden bells hanging from the necks of a herd of cattle that had been driven into the jungle for grazing. These wooden bells serve two purposes. The first and main object is to enable the herdsmen to locate in the thick underbrush the whereabouts of the animals that wear them. The second object is to frighten off any carnivora that becomes disposed to attack the wearers. Quite often the second purpose is successfully achieved, as tigers and panthers are suspicious animals and hesitate to attack a prey from whose neck is suspended a strange wooden object emitting queer sounds. But sometimes again

the ruse does not succeed, depending upon the nature of the particular tiger or panther concerned, and even more on its hunger at the given moment.

This particular afternoon was to witness one such exception. A fat and brown young bull was browsing on the outskirts of the herd, munching mouthfuls of grass beneath the shade of a clump of ficus trees. With each mouthful that it tore from the ground it would raise its head a little to gaze in idle speculation at the surrounding jungle, while its jaws worked steadily, munching the grass. Nothing seemed to stir and the brown bull was at peace with itself and the world.

It would not have felt so complacent, however, if it had gazed behind. Not a rustle rose as a tuft of grass parted to show two malevolent green eyes that stared with concentrated longing at the fat brown bull. The eyes were those of a large male panther of the big forest variety, and his heavy body, nearly equalling that of a tigress in dimensions, was pressed low to the ground, the colouring of his rosettes merging naturally with the various tints of the grasses.

Slowly and noiselessly the panther drew his hind legs to a crouching position. His muscles quivered and vibrated with tenseness. His whole form swayed gently, to gain balance for the death-charge that was to follow.

Then, as a bolt from the blue, that charge took place. As a streak of yellow and black spots, the heavy body of the panther hurtled through the air and, before the brown bull was aware that anything was happening, the cruel yellow fangs buried themselves in its jugular. For a moment the bull struggled to maintain its equilibrium with its forefeet apart, hoping to gallop into the midst of the grazing herd. But with its air supply cut off, and its lifeblood jetting from the torn throat, its resistance was but momentary. It crashed to earth with a thud all four feet lashing out desperately in an attempt to kick off the attacker. The panther adroitly squirmed his body out of reach of the lashing hooves, but never released his merciless grip on the bull's throat. A snorting gurgle burst from the gaping mouth of the stricken animal, the feet kicked less vigorously, and then its terror-stricken eyes slowly took on a glazed and lifeless expression as death came within a few minutes of the attack.

Thus did Nathan, the herdsman, lose one of his best beasts, as the rest of the herd, alarmed by the noise made by the dying bull, galloped through the jungle for safety to the forest-line that eventually led to the village, a couple of miles away.

But this was not to be Nathan's only loss. In the next three months he lost four more of his cattle, while the other two herdsmen who lived in the same village each lost a couple. On the other hand, the panther responsible for these attacks concluded, and no doubt quite

justifiably, that he had found a locality where food was plentiful and easy to get. He decided to live nearby in preference to moving through the forest in his normal hunt for game, which was far more arduous anyhow.

The monsoons then came and with the heavy rains pasture grew up everywhere and it became unnecessary to drive the herds of cattle into the jungle for grazing. Grass sprang up near the village itself, and in the few adjacent fields, and the herds were kept close to the village where they could be more carefully watched.

This change, of course, was not relished by the panther, and he became bolder, as he was forced by circumstances to stalk the herds in the new pastures.

The forest thinned out in the vicinity of the village, while the fields themselves were completely tree-less. This made the panther's approach more and more difficult, and often enough the herdsmen saw him as he tried to creep towards their charges. On such occasions they would shout, throw stones at him and brandish the staves they carried. These demonstrations would frighten him away.

Then his hunger increased, he found that he must choose between abandoning the village herds altogether as prey and go back to stalking the wild animals of the forests, or adopting a more belligerent policy towards the herdsmen.

The panther decided to adopt the latter policy.

One evening he crept as far as possible under cover and then dashed openly towards the nearest cow. Two herdsmen, standing quite near, saw him coming. They shouted and waved their sticks, but his charge never faltered till he had buried his fangs in the cow's throat. The herdsmen stood transfixed for the few minutes it took for the cow to die. Then they began to hurl stones and invectives at the spotted aggressor while he lay with heaving flanks across the still-quivering carcass of his prey.

When the stones thudded around, the panther let go his grip on the cow and with blood-smeared snout growled hideously at the men, his evil countenance contorted and his eyes blazing with hatred. Faced with that hideous visage and those bloodcurdling growls the herdsmen ran away.

At this stage of affairs the villagers requested the local forester to do something to help them; otherwise to enlist help from some other quarter. The forester, whose name was Ramu, had done a bit of shooting himself and owned a single-barrelled twelve-bore breech-loading gun. Although it was part of his duties as the representative of the government to check poachers, he himself was accustomed to indulge in a little poaching over water holes and salt licks, his quarry being the various kinds of deer that visited such spots, or an

occasional jungle pig. As often as was possible he avoided letting his subordinates, the forest guards, know of these surreptitious activities, but when that was not possible he made sure of the guards' silence by giving them a succulent leg from the animal he had shot, together with a string of dire threats of what he would do to them if a word about it was breathed to the range officer. Despite all these precautions, however, the range officer had come to know of Ramu's favourite pastime. He was a conscientious young officer, keen to uphold the government's policy of game preservation, and tried to catch his subordinate in the act. But that worthy had so far succeeded in keeping a clean official slate. Perhaps he was too wily, or his threats to the guards so fearsome that the Range Officer (R.O.) had not yet succeeded.

So far Ramu had not tried his weapon against any of the larger carnivora, and when the villagers approached him for help to shoot the panther he was not over-keen to tackle the proposition. But the villagers persisted in their requests, and soon it was made very evident to Ramu that his honour was at stake, for he could not delay indefinitely with vague excuses of being too busy to come to the village, or of having run out of stock of ammunition, and so forth.

Therefore Ramu arrived at the village one morning carrying his weapon. He was hailed as the would-be saviour of the situation and immediately took full advantage of the fact by settling down to a very hearty meal provided by the villagers. After washing this down with a lota (tumbler) of coffee, he belched contentedly and announced his intention of indulging in a nap for an hour before tackling the business for which he had come.

Ramu awoke a couple of hours later, by which time it was past midday. He then demanded of the headman that a goat should be provided as bait. This was done and Ramu set out for the jungle, accompanied by five or six villagers.

Being the forester in charge of the section he was well-acquainted with the locality and had already selected, in his mind, the tree on which to build his *machan*. This was a large banyan, growing conveniently at the point where the track from the village and the forest fire-line met. It also happened that a *nullah* intersected the fire-line near the same spot. The panther was known to traverse all three of these approaches as had been evidenced by his frequent pug-marks, so that Ramu's choice was indeed a wise one; for if the panther walked along the fire-line or came up the *nullah* he could not help spotting his goat, while he himself, in the *machan*, could see up and down both these approaches as well as part of the track leading to the village.

On this tree, then, Ramu instructed the villagers who had accompanied him to build a *machan* twenty feet or so off the ground,

and being well-skilled in the art of making hide-outs himself, contrived to conceal it cleverly with leaves, so that it would be quite unnoticeable to the panther.

It was past four o'clock that evening before the work was completed. Ramu climbed into the *machan* and the goat was then tethered by a rope round its neck to a stake that had been driven into the ground.

When the villagers left, the goat, finding itself alone, gazed in the direction of the village *path* and bleated lustily. Conditions were as perfect as could be, and the panther heard the goat and pounced upon it at about six, while the light was still good. Ramu had loaded his gun with an L.G. cartridge which he fired at the panther while the latter was holding the goat to the ground by its throat. There was a loud cough; and the panther somersaulted before dashing off into the undergrowth. The goat, which was already dying from suffocation and the wound inflicted in its throat, was killed outright by a pellet that passed through its ear into the brain.

Ramu waited awhile, then descended the banyan tree and hastily retreated to the village, where he told the people that he was sure he had hit the panther and had no doubt that they would find him dead the next morning.

With daylight a large party of men assembled and, headed by Ramu, went down to the banyan tree. There they found that the goat had been completely eaten during the night by a hyaena. Ramu pointed out the direction in which the panther had leaped and the whole party of men searched in close formation. It was not long before they came upon a blood-trail on the leaves of the bushes and lantana, indicating that in truth he had scored a hit. But of the panther there was no sign, although the party followed the trail for over a mile before it eventually petered out.

For two months after this no fresh attacks on cattle or goats were recorded, and everyone, including Ramu, was sure that the panther had gone away into some thicket and died.

Then one evening a lad of about 16 years was returning to the village along the same forest line. He was alone. Coming around a bend he saw a panther squatting on his haunches about twenty yards away, looking directly at him He halted in his tracks, expecting the panther to make of as an ordinary panther would do. But this panther did nothing of the kind. Instead, he changed his position to a crouch and began to snarl viciously.

The boy turned around and ran the way he had come, and the panther pursued him. Luckily, at the place he overtook the boy, a piece of rotting wood happened to be lying across the forest line. As the panther jumped on his back and bit through his shoulder near the

neck, the boy was borne to earth by the weight, and in falling saw the piece of rotting wood. Terror and desperation lent strength to his hands and an unusual quickness to his mind. Grasping the wood, he rolled sideways and jammed the end into the panther's mouth. This caused the panther to release his hold, but not before he had severely scratched the boy's arm and thighs with his claws. Springing to his feet, the boy lashed out at him again; this unexpected retaliation by his victim caused the panther to lose courage and he leaped into the bushes. Still grasping the wood that had saved his life, and with blood streaming down his chest, back, arms and legs, the boy made a staggering run for the village.

That was the first attack made upon a human being. The next followed some three weeks later, and this time the panther did not run away. It happened that a goat-herd was returning with his animals when a panther attacked them and seized upon one. The herdsman was poor and the herd represented all his worldly wealth. So he tried to save his goat by screaming at the panther as he ran towards him, whirling his staff. It was a brave but silly thing to have done, knowing that a panther was in the vicinity that had recently attacked a human being without provocation. He paid for his foolish bravery with his life, for the panther left the goat and leapt upon him to clamp his jaws firmly in his throat.

The goats ran back to the village. Seeing no herdsman returning with them, some of the villagers wondered what had occurred, but for the moment did not attach any significance to what they had noticed. It transpired that this herdsman was alone and had no relatives, so that it was nearly an hour later and growing dusk before his absence was really accepted as a fact, and it became evident that something had happened to him. It was too late by then to do anything.

Next morning the villagers gathered in a party of about thirty persons, armed with clubs and staves, and left the village to try to find the goatherd. They went down the track leading from the village to the jungle. The hoof-marks of the herd of goats as they had run back to the village the previous evening were clearly visible along the trail. They proceeded a little further and there they came upon the spot where the panther had made the attack. Clearly impressed in the dusty earth were the pug-marks of the large spotted cat. There was also a distinct drag-mark where the panther had hauled his victim away. Scattered at intervals were a few drops of blood from the throat of the man that had trickled to the ground. But the earth away from the track was sun-baked and hard and had absorbed the blood, and it was difficult to locate, though the drag-mark was quite clear.

The panther had taken his victim off the track along which the man had been driving his goats, and had hauled the body into the

jungle. But he had not gone very far from where he had originally made his kill, and within about a hundred yards the group of villagers discovered the body of the victim. The chest and a small portion of one thigh had been eaten. Thus the maneater of the Yellagiris came into existence.

The Yellagiris are a crescent-shaped formation of hills lying immediately to the east of Jalarpet Junction railway station on the Southern Railway. The opening of the crescent faces away from the Junction, while its apex, so to speak, rises abruptly some three thousand feet above sea level about two miles from the station. A very rough zigzag *path* winds up the steep incline, and in places one has to clamber from boulder to boulder.

Many years ago—in 1941 in fact—I had purchased a farm of small acreage at the top of this ridge. I had intended keeping this farm, which is about ninety-five miles from Bangalore, as a weekend resort, but had not found the time to visit it regularly. As a result, the open land was quickly being encroached upon by the ever-prolific lantana shrub.

I had decided to visit this place for about three days to supervise the removal of the lantana, and when I made this visit I happened to arrive a few days after the death of the goatherd. The coolies I had engaged for the work told me about the panther, of which no news had been published in any of the newspapers. They assured me that it continued to haunt the precincts of the village, for they had again seen its pug-marks only the previous day.

The news interested me and I thought I might as well make an attempt to bag the animal. I had brought neither of my rifles with me, but only my twelve-bore shotgun, as the Yellagiris abound in jungle fowl and during the few visits I had made there I had always shot a couple each time for the pot. Further, with this object in view, I had brought along with me only two L.G. cartridges for emergencies, the rest being number six shot for the jungle fowl. Therefore I would have to make sure of the panther with the only two L.G. shells available.

I stopped work on the lantana about midday and went back with the labourers to reconnoitre the ground. It was much as I had expected. The jungle fell away into a narrow belt of lantana which ceased only at the few fields that bordered the village. Clearly visible on a footpath at the end of one of these fields was the trail of a panther—a fairly large adult male, judging from his pugs. He had passed that way only the night before.

I went to the village and introduced myself to the *Patel*, or headman, whom I had never met before, and told him how I came to be there. He expressed great pleasure at my presence and was most enthusiastic in his promises of every cooperation. We held a

discussion and I told the *Patel* that I would like to buy a goat to tie up as a bait in the initial stage of my operations against the panther.

And here was where the *Patel's* cooperation was needed, as no goats were available in his village. It was only with much difficulty and considerable delay that he was able to procure one for me from a neighbouring hamlet, a kid that was small enough in size to ensure that it would bleat when tied up. The *Patel* himself accompanied me, and four other men, one of them leading the goat, the rest carrying hatchets with which to construct a *machan*.

They led me back along the track to the place where the herdsman had been attacked, and finally to the spot at which they had found his remains. It was densely overgrown with small bushes of the Inga dulcis plant, known as the 'Madras thorn' or 'Korkapulli' tree. It was out of the question to sit on the ground there, as the thorns grew so close together as to prevent one from seeing any animal beyond the distance of a couple of yards. So we were compelled to retrace our steps along the track for about a quarter of a mile.

There we came upon quite a large and leafy jack-fruit tree which, with its thick leaves growing in profusion, seemed to provide the ideal setting for the construction of a *machan*. At about a height of eight feet the first branch led off the main stem of the tree. The third branch after that extended over the track itself and bifurcated conveniently at about fifteen feet from the ground.

Across this bifurcation I instructed my followers to build the *machan*. This they set about doing by first lopping small branches off the neighbouring tree and removing the leaves. They then laid the lopped sticks across the bifurcation, tying them to the two arms with vines cut from the jungle. By this means they had soon made a platform about four feet long by three feet wide. This would be sufficient for me to sit on. Finally, the four sides of the *machan* were well camouflaged with the leaves they had just removed from the small branches they had cut down to build the base of the *machan*. We also took great care to conceal the base of the platform itself with leaves, so that to a panther standing anywhere around at any angle, or even directly below, nothing would be visible of the occupant sitting in the *machan*, nor would anything seem to be out of place to arouse his suspicions unduly.

I got one of the men to make a stake out of a piece of wood, sharpened it a little at one end and then hammered it into the hard ground with a boulder at a distance of just over twenty feet from the *machan*, keeping in mind the fact that I was using a shotgun.

When all this was ready I climbed into the *machan* myself and made an opening in the leaves to face the stake and in such a position that I would have a clear view of the goat and a small portion of the

ground around it. By the time we were ready it was nearly five in the evening.

As I have already stated, I had not come to the Yellagiris to shoot big game, so I had not brought my night equipment, the torch that I used to clamp to the barrel of my rifle. Instead, I had brought a small two-cell affair which I only used in camp. It threw only a diffused beam and was quite inadequate for the work which I now had in hand. Further, having no clamp, I would have to hold the torch itself in my left hand and close to the barrel of the gun. The outlook was not so good, since I had come during the moonless period of the month and would have to rely on sounds and my own senses to judge the presence and exact whereabouts of the panther in the darkness, would he turn up.

Bearing all these facts in mind, I settled down in the *machan* and made myself as comfortable as possible. Then I instructed the men to tether the goat to the stake and walk back to the village, talking loudly to each other. Not only would their withdrawal in this fashion cause the goat to begin bleating as it saw them going away, but should the panther be watching anywhere in the vicinity, their noisy departure, coupled with the bleating of the goat, would induce him to come out early to dinner.

According to instructions, the men tied the goat to the stake and began to walk back in the direction of the village, talking loudly. The goat immediately strained at the rope that held it to the stake and started to bleat so loudly and persistently that I mentally congratulated the *Patel* on the choice of the bait he had selected. I became certain that if the panther was anywhere around within a mile of this goat he would surely hear its cries and hasten to his intended victim.

But nothing that I expected came to pass. The goat called persistently and loudly, so much so that by the time the sun had set it had become quite hoarse and its cries dwindled to husky squeaks. Twilight found the goat so hoarse that it appeared to resign itself to the inevitable and a night in the open. Folding its forelegs first, it settled down on the ground and fell asleep. I now knew there was but little chance of the panther locating the goat unless it actually happened to pass by and practically stumble upon it. Still, I decided to wait till about nine o'clock and chance my luck.

The next two and a half hours were like many others that I had spent in the jungle under similar circumstances. The calls of the feathered denizens of the forest had long since died away at least those that belonged to the day. The only sound that could be heard occasionally was the peculiar low whistle of the 'herdboy' bird. This is a grey night-bird, some eight inches in length which emits a low but

very penetrating cry exactly resembling the sounds invariably made by herdsmen as they tend their cattle while grazing in the forest, to keep them together. Hence its name, or to give it its Tamil original, 'mat-paya kurvi', by which it is known throughout southern India. Incidentally, it is a bird that appears to live only in jungly regions, or their immediate vicinity, as I have never come across it in the cultivated areas.

There is nothing more that I can tell you, beyond the fact that at 9.15 p.m. I decided to abandon the vigil. I shone the torch in the direction of the goat, but the spreading beam hardly reached the sleeping animal, which I could just detect as a faint blur as I heard it scramble to its feet. Had the panther attacked that goat I would not have been able to see it properly, so I consoled myself with the thought that perhaps it was just as well the panther had not turned up.

Climbing down from the tree I untied the goat and, taking it is tow, went back to the village, where I left it with one of the men who had helped to put up the *machan*, instructing him to look after it until the next day.

Early the following morning I returned to the village to glean as much additional information about the panther as I could. But there was nothing more that anybody could tell me, beyond the facts already related at the beginning of this story, which I slowly pieced together. Nobody knew exactly from where the panther had come and nobody could suggest any particular locality in which he might be living.

The work on my land occupied the next three days, and each evening of those three days I spent in the same *machan*, sitting up with different goats as baits till a few hours before midnight. But all those three evenings drew a blank, in that I heard no sound of the panther. Each morning I would scour the vicinity of the *machan*, the forest-lines, and various stream-beds, but there were no fresh pug-marks of the animal for which I was looking, showing that he had not passed anywhere nearby during those nights. Very probably he had moved off to some distant part of the Yellagiri Hills.

On the fourth morning I left for Bangalore, after handing the village *Patel* my name and address and money for a telegram which he was to send by a runner to Jalarpet railway station.

Over a month passed. No telegram came and I decided that the panther was not a regular man-eater or had perhaps left the Yellagiri Hills to cross the intervening belt of cultivated plain to reach the much more extensive range of forest that clothed to reach the Javadi Hills. This latter range is a wide one and leads far beyond the Yellagiris in a southeasterly direction towards Tiruvannamalai, which

is a sacred hill inhabited by a sage said to be possessed of many gifts.

I was quite wrong, as events were to prove.

Seven weeks passed before the telegram, which I had almost forgotten, arrived. It told me that the 'mail-carrier', who brought the 'tappal', or post, from Jalarpet up the hill to the various villages and settlers at the top, had been killed by the panther.

The telegram did not reach me till after three in the afternoon. Nevertheless, by hurrying I was able to catch the Trichinopoly Express which left Bangalore at seven o'clock and reached Jalarpet at 10.30 p.m. I had brought my petromax lantern with me, and by its bright light walked from the station up the hill to reach the village, eight miles away, just before 2 a.m. Normally I would not have dared to risk that rough and steep boulder-covered track by night with a man-eating panther in the vicinity, but I knew that it would be quite safe as long as I had the petromax burning. My 405-rifle and haversack of equipment strapped to my back, plus the light hanging from my left hand, made quite a sizeable and uncomfortable load up that steep track, and I was drenched in perspiration by the time I reached the top of the hill. The village was still a mile away, and a cold breeze chilled my damp clothes as they dried on my back while I walked along.

I awoke the *Patel*, who in turn awoke most of the village, so that a concourse of a hundred dusky faces and gleaming white teeth surrounded me in the light of the petromax.

The *Patel* offered me food, which I politely declined, but I told him I would be grateful for some hot tea. This was soon prepared, and while sipping it from a large brass utensil belonging to the *Patel*, I heard the story he had to tell me.

Actually there was nothing much to tell. After my last visit everybody had been very careful when moving about in the day, particularly in the vicinity of the forest. At night they had remained indoors. Then as the weeks had passed without any further signs of the panther, as always happened vigilance was correspondingly relaxed.

The mail-carrier used to ascend the hill early in the morning, leaving Jalarpet at about 6 a.m. from the small post office situated adjacent to the railway station. All the mail trains passed during the night, from Bangalore as well as from Madras on the east coast and Calicut on the west coast. Postal traffic to the Yellagiris was comparatively small, and the few letters or articles that were destined for the hill-top were placed in individual bags by the sorters on the various mail trains and unloaded at Jalarpet Station. The mail-carrier, who was to ascend the hill, would open these bags in order to place all their contents into the one bag he carried up, slung across his shoulders or sometimes balanced on his head.

His one protection—which was intended not so much as a weapon of protection as an emblem and badge of office, as well as a sound-device to frighten away snakes—was a short spear, on the shaft of which were fitted a number of iron rings. This spear he would carry in his hand, striking the base of it against the ground at every few paces. The rings would jangle against the iron shaft and against each other, making the loud jingling-jangling noise that has been known to the mail-carriers for almost a hundred years throughout the length and breadth of India.

On that fateful day the mail-carrier had as usual set out from the small post office at Jalarpet at about six o'clock in the morning. But he never reached the top of the hill. The villagers had become accustomed to hearing him and seeing him as he jingled and jangled his daily route through the main street of the village. But that morning they had not heard the familiar sound. With the indifference and apathy peculiar to the East, nobody worried or thought anything about it.

After the midday meal, a party of men had started to descend the hill, bound for Jalarpet. About a quarter of the way down, they noticed the rusty colour of dried blood splashed on the rocks that formed a trail. They had stopped to wonder about it, when the sharp eyes of one individual had noticed the mail-carrier's spear lying away from the track and near a bush. Guessing what had happened, the whole party turned tail and hurried back to the village. There they had gathered reinforcements, including the *Patel*, and returned eventually to find the partly eaten corpse of the unfortunate mail-carrier.

The *Patel* had written out the telegram and sent it by the same party of men to be despatched to me from Jalarpet Station. With all the confusion it had not reached me till after three the following evening, a delay of some twenty-four hours, although Jalarpet is just eighty-nine miles from Bangalore. I was also informed that the police authorities at Jalarpet had removed the body for inquest and cremation.

By the time all this conversation was over and I had elicited all the information I required, or perhaps it would be more correct to say all the information that the *Patel* and the villagers knew about the panther, it was past four in the morning. The *Patel* lent me a rope cot which I carried to the outskirts of the village, where I lay down upon it for a brief sleep of two hours till dawn, when I awoke, not to the familiar calls of the forest, but to the loud yapping of a couple of curs who were regarding me on the rope cot with very evident suspicion and distaste.

As I have said, the Yellagiri Hills do not hold a great deal of

regular forest, and there is therefore a complete absence of aboriginal jungle-folk of any kind. I realised that I would have to rely upon the villagers and myself to try to discover ways and means of locating the panther.

One of the questions I had asked earlier that morning concerned the panther's possible hide-out. No definite reply had been given to this, but a couple of cattle-grazers had stated that they had on three or four occasions during the past few weeks observed a panther sunning himself in the afternoon on a rocky ledge of a hill named 'Periamalai' or 'Big Hill', to give it its English translation. The Yellagiris themselves form a plateau at the top, and this Periamalai is the one and only hill rising above the level of the plateau and forms the highest peak of the crescent-shaped Yellagiri range. It is nearly 4,500 feet above mean sea level.

I went to the *Patel's* house and found him still asleep, but he soon woke up and offered me a large 'chumbo', which is a round brass vessel like a miniature water-pot, of hot milk to drink. I then asked him to call the cattle-tenders who had seen the panther on Periamalai and to ask them to accompany me to the hill and point out the particular ledge which the panther was said to frequent.

It took some time before these two individuals could be persuaded to go with me. They were most unwilling and I could see that they were definitely scared. However, the *Patel* used his own methods of persuasion, which included threats of retribution if they refused, so eventually I was able to set out accompanied by them.

Periamalai is situated about three miles to the east of the village and in the opposite direction to the *path* from Jalarpet, which ascends to the west. In all, about five miles lay between this hill and the spot where the unfortunate mailman had been killed. In addition, practically all the land between was cultivated. The jungle covering Periamalai itself receded down the slopes of the Yellagiri range in the direction of that portion of the crescent that faces north. I was not happy about this as I felt that the cattle-grazers might have seen another panther entirely, and not the one that had killed the postman.

Arriving at the base of Periamalai, my two companions pointed to a ledge of rock that jutted out some 300 feet above, and stated that that was the spot where they had seen the panther sunning himself on several afternoons. Thick lantana scrub grew from the foot of the hill right up to the base of the ledge and to about halfway up Periamalai, where the regular forest began. I could see that, as was happening with so many of the smaller forest tracks in southern India, the lantana pest was slowly but surely encroaching on the jungle proper and smothering the original trees. Like the Yellagiri range itself, Periamalai is a rocky hill consisting of piles of boulders and to look for

a panther in that sea of lantana and among those rocks would be a hopeless task, as the former was impenetrable.

So I marked out a place under a tree growing at the foot of the hill and told the men that we would return to the village and procure a bait, and that they should come back with it and tie it at the spot I had selected.

Accordingly we went back and the *Patel* procured for me a donkey. A goat would have been of no use in this case as I did not intend to sit up with it. Should it be killed, the panther would devour it at one meal and there would be nothing left to justify his return the following night, whereas the donkey was big enough to warrant the panther coming back for what remained after the first meal. Against this was the disadvantage that a goat would more readily and quickly attract the panther by its bleating, whereas a donkey would be silent.

But I relied on the fact that if the panther lived anywhere on the hill, from his elevated position he would be able to see the donkey tied on the lower ground. So I borrowed some stout rope and instructed the cattlemen to take the donkey up and tether it at the spot I had already pointed out to them.

This done, the *Patel* himself and three or four villagers came along with me to point out the place where the mail-carrier had been done to death. It turned out to be at a spot about a mile and a half from the village, just where the track from Jalarpet passed through a belt of lantana and rocky boulders. I had, of course, passed the place myself the previous night when ascending the hill with the lantern, but had not noticed the blood in the lantern-light. No doubt this had been just as well or my tranquillity would have been greatly perturbed.

We came upon a few dried splashes of blood on the trail, and my companions pointed out me a spot nearby to where the unfortunate man had been dragged and partly eaten. As I have already said, his remains had been removed to Jalarpet for cremation, so that there was nothing to be gained by remaining there any longer.

A cashew-nut tree stood beside the trail about three hundred yards higher up, and beneath this tree I asked the *Patel* to tie another donkey.

Then we walked back to the village, and I suggested that a third donkey be tied at some place where the scrub jungle came closest to the village. The *Patel* once more used his influence to procure two more donkeys and sent them out by different parties of men to be tied as I had instructed.

It was past one in the afternoon by the time all this had been done, and I realized that there was nothing more for me to do but await events. I could only hope the panther would kill one of three donkeys that night, provided of course he chanced to come upon it. Since the

panther had made but only a few human kills thus far, it was clear that he was mainly existing upon other meat.

The *Patel* set a hot meal before me, consisting of rice and dhal curry, mixed with brinjals and onions grown on his land and made tremendously hot with red chillies which had been liberally added. I must say I enjoyed that meal, though the sweat poured down my face in rivulets as a result of the chillies. My host was highly amused at this sight and began to apologise, but I stopped him with the assurance that I did enjoy such a meal. Copious draughts of coffee followed, and when I finally arose I was a very contented person.

To pass the time I went down to my small farm and pottered about for the rest of that evening. You may be interested to know that this farm of mine consists of only one and a half acres of land, but it is a very compact farm at that. There is a 'marking-nut' tree, from the nut of which a black fluid is extracted for making a marking-ink generally used by launderers and dhobis for writing the initials of the owners on the corner of each article they send to the wash. Once marked, this 'ink' cannot be washed out. Three 'jack' trees, which are of a grafted variety, produce fruit weighing from two to twelve pounds each or even more. There are a few guava trees, some peaches and a vegetable garden. The two existing buildings, or *kottais* as they are called are mud-walled affairs with thick thatched roofs made from a mixture of jungle grass and the stalks of '*cholam*' grain. A small rose and croton garden fronts them. At that time I had about three dozen fowls, including leghorns, rhodes and black minorcas, and a few ducks. My drinking-water comes from a small well into which I introduced some fish, which I had originally brought from Bangalore to keep the water clean. A small stream in front forms one of my boundaries, and bamboo trees line the other three sides. Although such a small place, it is extremely 'cosy', and an ideal retreat for a quiet Sunday visit from Bangalore.

About half the land is low-lying and borders the stream I have just mentioned. I have tapped some water from this rivulet and grown a variety of black rice, known as 'Pegu rice' and originally imported from Burma. To my knowledge, my farm was one of the very few spots in southern India where this black Burma-rice then grew. I knew it had been sown in many places, but its cultivation had proved a failure for one reason or another.

An interesting feature about this farm was a story that one of the two *kottais* was haunted by the ghost of the brother of the Anglo-Indian lady from whom I had purchased it in 1941, lock, stock and barrel, poultry included, for the sum of Rs. 500/-; about £35 in English money. This man had died of a reputedly mysterious disease which I was told occurred in sudden attacks of excruciating pain in his

left arm and chest—probably angina pectoris. He had been very much attached to the small farm and was said to have spent over twenty-five years there after purchasing it as waste land. Then he gave it to his sister, as he had no family of his own. However, as the story went, after his death, passing villagers had frequently seen him standing before his *kottai* in the evenings just as dusk was falling. Thereafter, needless to say, the villagers avoided the place.

His sister told me nothing about the alleged haunting till the day after I had purchased the farm and paid the cash before the sub-registrar when I had registered the sale deed, probably thinking the 'ghost' would put me off the transaction. Then she told me that her dead brother would sometimes roam about the two *kottais* at night, and also that she had clearly seen him many times in the moonlight attending the rose trees which had been his special hobby. She hastened to add that the 'spirit' was quite harmless, made no sound or troublesome manifestation, and just faded away if approached.

I have failed to mention that some very ancient furniture came to me with the *kottais:* a bed in each building, a broken-down dressing table, two almirahs and some three or four rather rickety chairs. The beds were of the old-fashioned sort, having battens.

I well remember the first night I slept in one of the *kottais* (incidentally the one in which the brother had died), for it was a rainy night and the roof of the other *kottai* was leaking. I had spread my bedroll, without mattress, on the battened cot and had lain down to sleep. The hard battens, however, were irksome and pressed against my shoulder blades and back. After failing to woo slumber for some time, I had decided that the floor would be far more comfortable. Of course, there were no electric lights, so I had lighted a candle to enable me to remove the bedroll and place it on the floor, when I had extinguished the candle and lain down to sleep. This time I was successful and had fallen asleep immediately.

I do not know when I awoke. It was pitch dark. Something heavy and cold and clammy moved and rested against my throat, and what seemed *like* two icy wet fingers extended across either side of my neck.

Now I am not an imaginative person. I am not afraid of the dark. Nor am I superstitious. But in a rush of memory I recollected the dead brother and his ghost, the fact that I had left my torch on the windowsill some feet away, and also that I did not know where I had left the matchbox. These thoughts came simultaneously, while the cold clammy wet thing distinctly moved and seemed to press its two extended fingers even more tightly on either side of my throat. I could feel my hair rising. To lie there any longer was impossible. With what seemed superhuman energy I scrambled to my feet and dashed

towards the unfamiliar windowsill where I had left my torch. Probing wildly in the dark, I at last found that elusive torch. I pressed the button, expecting to see the ghost and its clammy hands, cold from the grave, before me! Instead, there on the floor was quite the largest toad I had ever seen in my life. A huge, black, slimy fellow, almost a foot long. He had come into the *kottai* because of the rain.

This just goes to show what human nerves can do. Hardly a few seconds earlier I had been scared stiff by the thought of the supernatural and the unknown. Now I laughed to myself as I guided the toad with the toe of my slippered foot to the door of the *kottai*, and then out into the rain.

Next morning all three donkey baits were alive, and so I spent the day on my land. No one had any news to give about the panther. Another night passed and the following morning found all three of the donkeys still in the land of the living. This time there was a little news. After the death of the mail-carrier the post was conveyed up the hill by three men instead of one, the party consisting of the relief mail-carrier who had replaced the poor fellow that had been killed, together with two *chowkidars*—literally, 'watchmen'—who had been pressed into service to accompany him as bodyguards. They were armed with crude spears in addition to the 'emblem of office' spear which had once been the equipment of the deceased mail-carrier and now automatically fell to his successor.

These three men excitedly reported at the village that they had seen a panther sunning himself on the ledge of a rock about a quarter of a mile downhill from the place where the previous mail-carrier had been done to death.

Upon hearing this news the *Patel* had despatched a villager to run and tell me. Taking my rifle, I accompanied him back to the village, where both the *chowkidars* offered to come along with me to point out the rock. We covered the distance of a little over two miles in good time. But only the bare rock-ledge stared us in the face. The panther that had been lying there, man-eater or otherwise, had gone, and it was too hot, too rocky and too hopeless to search for him among the piles of boulders. However, the news was encouraging, as it indicated the panther was still in the vicinity. Before returning to the village and my small farm, I once again examined the bait under the cashew tree and mentally selected the branch on which I would fix my *machan* if occasion arose.

That night brought good luck, though bad for the donkey beneath the cashew-nut tree, for the panther killed and ate about half of him during the hours of darkness.

Early next morning this fact was discovered by the party of men whom I had delegated to inspect, feed and water each one of the three

baits in turn. They came back and told me, after having taken the precaution to cover the remains of the donkey with branches to protect it from being devoured to the bones by vultures.

I finished an early lunch and with my greatcoat, torch and flask of tea and some biscuit, proceeded to the village, where I readily obtained the loan of a *charpoy* from the *Patel*. Four willing helpers carried this to the cashew-nut tree, where it was slung up and secured with the ropes we had brought along with us. I personally supervised the camouflaging of the *charpoy* with small branches and leaves, till it was invisible from every direction, as well as from below. That this job should be done very thoroughly was, I knew, most essential when dealing with man-eating carnivora. The slightest carelessness might make all the difference between success and failure. A leaf turned the other way, with its under-surface showing uppermost, or any portion of the *charpoy* being visible from any angle, a remnant of twigs or fallen leaves at the base of the tree, any of these would be sufficient to arouse the suspicion of a man-eater, which is always extremely cautious in returning to its kill.

All arrangements were eventually completed to my satisfaction, and the only fault that I could find was that the *machan* was rather low, not more than ten feet from the ground. Also that the cashew-nut tree was easy to climb. It was about two-thirty in the afternoon when the party of men who had accompanied me left, after I had instructed them to return at dawn in case I did not go back to the village myself during the night.

I sat back on the *machan* and made myself as comfortable as possible.

It was a sweltering afternoon, the heat being reflected by the boulders that were piled around in all directions. The tree itself afforded little protection from the afternoon sun that beat down upon me. Indeed, I was glad when evening approached and the sun began sinking towards the Mysore plateau to the west. Far below me I could see Jalarpet railway station on the plains, and the puffs of cream-coloured smoke from the shunting-engines in the yard. At intervals a train would arrive or leave, and the whistles of the locomotives could be clearly heard. All else was silent.

Towards dusk a single peacock wailed in the distance and a couple of nightjars flitted around the tree. Except for them there were no signs of any other animals or birds.

Then the shadows of night descended. Sitting on the slope of the hill facing the west, I could see the plains grow dark as if covered by a black mantle, while yet the last vestiges of daylight lingered on the hilltop above me. The lights of Jalarpet began to twinkle one by one, prominent among them being the blue-tinted neon lamps of the

station platforms and shunting yards. Here and there I could make out the red and green lights of the railway signals. From the north a train rolled towards Jalarpet, the bright headlamp of the engine cutting a swath of light before it. Then the train encountered an incline and the engine began to labour under its load. 'If she can do it … I can do it … if she can do it … I can do it.' Her puffs as she struggled to top the rise formed the words in my imagination, and I listened to the clanking of her worn big-end bearings. All these sounds seemed so close to me—and yet they were so far; they were over five miles away at least, as the crow flies.

Darkness fell around me. It was a moonless night. The heavy clouds scuttled across the sky, some of them merging with the tops of the Yellagiri range. No friendly stars shone down, and the darkness became intense. I would have to rely on my sense of hearing.

Insects were conspicuous by their absence, and even the friendly chirp of the wood-cricket was not to be heard. I sat still on the cot. Now and then a passing mosquito buzzed around my head, to settle on some part of my face or hands. Then came the faint sharp sting of pain as it imbedded its needle-pointed proboscis into my skin. I would move my fingers or hand a little, or noiselessly blow against my own face by slightly protruding my lower lip. This would disturb the mosquito, which would either go on its way or fly around in a further effort to take another bite at me.

I am accustomed to sitting up in the jungle on *machans* or in hide-outs and so lost count of the time, for in any case it served no purpose to keep looking at my wristwatch unnecessarily. I could not anyway make time pass quicker.

Thoughts of all kinds creep into a man's mind on such occasions, some pleasant, some otherwise, and some reminiscent. I remember that, that evening, for some unaccountable reason, I began thinking of some way of inventing a new sort of bicycle, something that one could propel fast and for long distances with the minimum of effort. Is it not strange what the human mind may think of when it is forced to be idle?

My reveries concerning this bicycle were disturbed by what seemed like a faint sigh. I knew the panther had arrived and was standing over the dead donkey. The muffled sound I had heard had been made by his expelled breath as he slightly opened his mouth.

I reasoned that to switch on my torch and fire at this juncture might be premature. Better to let him settle down to his meal. I wish I hadn't, for in doing so I lost what might have been a successful shot, and caused the death of another human being.

I waited expectantly for the sound of the meat being torn, and bones being crunched, which would have assured me that the panther

was tucking in at the donkey, but instead I heard nothing. The moments slipped by and then I became uncomfortably suspicious that something had gone wrong.

I know from experience how noiseless any of the carnivora can be when they want to; particularly a panther which can come and go not only soundlessly, but also without being seen, and that too in broad daylight. Under the present conditions of intense darkness this animal might have been a yard away, or a mile away, for all the difference it made in that gloom.

I glanced down at the luminous dial of my watch, which showed that it was twenty minutes to nine. I waited without moving. Nine o'clock came and passed, and then, from a section of boulders to my right, I heard a deep growl, followed in a few seconds by another.

Somehow the panther had become aware of my presence. He could not have smelt me, as panthers have little or no sense of smell. He could not have heard me, for I had made no sound. Therefore, he had either looked up inadvertently and become aware of the *machan*, or some intuition had warned him. In either case, he now knew a human being was there. He might then have tried climbing up into the tree to pull me down, but as likely as not his sense of self-preservation had warned him that this particular human being was dangerous to him and not of the same sort as the men he had killed.

Of course, this panther might not be a man-eater, although in the light of his present conduct this seemed the less reasonable explanation.

The growls were initially intended as a warning. As they increased they were also clearly meant to bolster up the animal's own courage. Perhaps he would lash himself into a fury after a sufficient number of growls to attack the tree on which I was sitting and try to climb up. As I have had occasion to remark before, panthers frequently do this with monkeys, whom they terrify with a series of loud growls before rushing at the trunk of the tree. Then the monkeys generally fall off or jump down in sheer terror. As likely as not he expected the noise he was making to have the same demoralising effect on me.

Very soon the growls increased both in volume and tempo. The panther was now making a terrific noise. As I had just thought, he was either trying to frighten me away completely or off my perch; alternatively, he was building up his own courage to rush the tree. I prepared for the latter eventuality.

Some more minutes of this sort of thing went on and then out he came with the peculiar coughing roar made by every charging panther. As he reached the base of the cashew-nut tree I leaned over the edge of the cot, pushing aside the camouflaging twigs to point the rifle downwards while depressing the switch of my torch. I knew I had

to be quick because, as I have told you, the *machan* was only about ten feet off the ground and, the tree being easy to climb, the panther would reach me in no time.

As bad luck would have it, one of the camouflaging branches fell down upon the panther. No doubt this served to delay, if not actually to deter, his progress up the tree. But it also served to screen him completely from the light of the torch. As I looked downwards I just saw the branch shaking violently and guessed that it covered the panther.

At that moment I did a foolish thing. Instead of waiting till the animal could break clear of the offending branch, I quickly aimed at the spot where I felt his body would be and pressed the trigger. The report of the shot was followed by the sound of a falling body as the panther went hurtling backwards to the ground. For a second I thought I had succeeded in killing him, but that thought lasted only for a second, for no sooner did he touch the ground than he jumped clear of the branch in which he had become entangled, and I caught a momentary glimpse of his yellow form leaping into the undergrowth before I had a chance to work the underlever that would reload my rifle.

I shone the torch at the spot where he had disappeared, but neither sight nor sound of him or his further progress came to me. Silence reigned supreme. He might be lying dead in the bushes, or he might be wounded there, or he might have disappeared and be a long way off. There was no way of knowing.

I continued to shine the torch around for some time and then decided to sit in darkness in the hope of hearing some sound of movement. But there was absolutely nothing. I waited for another hour and then made up my mind to fire a shot into the bushes in the direction in which he had gone, hoping it would elicit some reaction if he were lying there wounded. So, switching on the torch, I fired the rifle at the approximate spot where he had vanished. The crash of the report reverberated and echoed against the hillside, but there was no sound or response from the panther.

A goods train started from Jalarpet and began to climb the gradient to Mulanur on the ghat section that led to Bangalore. The banking engine at the rear, whose duty it was to help by pushing till the top of the gradient was reached, began to push vigorously and its puffing and clanking eclipsed the sounds made by the engine at the front, whose driver was perhaps taking it easy because of the ready help behind him.

I waited until 11.30 p.m. The loud whistling from the engine of the incoming Madras-Cochin Express decided me to come down from the tree and go back to my *kottai* for a comfortable night's sleep. I felt

quite safe in doing this as, had the panther been wounded and in the vicinity, he would have responded to the noise of my last shot. Either he was dead or far away. Even if he had been lying in wait, that last shot would have frightened him off.

I came down from the cashew-nut tree and by the light of my torch made my way back to the village, where, before going on to my *kottai*, I related all that had happened to the *Patel* and the excited villagers.

Early next morning I came back to the village, where at least twenty willing men assembled and offered to help me. They in turn, under my advice and directions, gathered half-a-dozen village curs. Thus, safe and strong in numbers, we proceeded to the cashew-nut tree and the site of the previous night's occurrences.

The remains of the donkey had been untouched. A hole in the ground, directly below the tree, showed where my bullet had buried itself in the earth, nor was a speck of blood to be seen anywhere. We thoroughly searched among the bushes into which the panther had disappeared and into which I had fired my second shot, as well as the surrounding boulders and bushes for quite a wide area, but it was clear that I had missed entirely and that my bullet of the night before had failed to score the lucky hit I had hoped for. The panther had got completely away.

Ill-tempered and disgusted with myself, I returned with the men to the village, where I told the *Patel* that my time was up and that I would have to return to Bangalore. However, I asked him to send me another telegram should there be further developments. Then I went to the *kottai*, gathered my belongings and packed them in my haversack, and soon was repassing the cashew-nut tree on my descent to Jalarpet, where I caught the evening express from Madras that got me home by eight-fifteen the same night.

That was the end of the first round of my encounter with the Yellagiri man-eating panther.

Contrary to expectations, I heard nothing more from the *Patel*. When two months had elapsed I wrote him a letter and received a reply within a few days stating that there had been no further news of the animal. This made me think that it may have relinquished its man-eating habits or have crossed over to the Javadi range of hills which lay scarcely fifteen miles south of the Yellagiris. On the other hand, had the latter been the case I would still have heard through the Press or by government notification if any people had been killed on the Javadi Hills. I was therefore inclined to the former theory and felt that the panther had given up his tendency to attack human beings. Of course, my chance shot might have found its mark, and the animal may have crept away to die in some secluded place. But this last

theory was hardly tenable.

Nine more weeks passed before the next news arrived in the form of a telegram from the *Patel*, despatched from Jalarpet railway station, stating that the panther had reappeared and once again killed a human being. The telegram asked me to come at once, and with two hours to spare I caught the next train.

This happened to be a slow train which brought me in to Jalarpet station at about half-past eight that night. There was no purpose in my climbing the hill immediately, for there was nothing I could do just then; so I decided to take a few hours' sleep in the waiting-room and make the ascent at dawn. This plan did not prove very successful, however. To begin with, the noise of the passing trains disturbed me each time I fell asleep, being a light sleeper. Secondly, the attacks of mosquitoes and bedbugs, with which the chair seemed to abound, impelled me to walk about the platform, which I did till five in the morning, when I set off for the foot of the Yellagiris about two miles away. It was dawn as I began the climb and I reached the *Patel's* village by 7.15 am.

My friend the *Patel* greeted me with his usual hospitality and brass 'chumbo' of heavily milked, hot coffee. Then he told me that the panther had attacked and killed a young woman three mornings previously, when she had gone to draw water from a stream running past the base of Periyamalai hill. He also informed me that the people of the village to which the girl had belonged had arrived shortly afterwards and recovered the remains of the victim for cremation. Apparently the panther had eaten but little of the unfortunate woman, perhaps because it had been disturbed by the party of men searching for her and had not had time to settle down to his meal.

This time I decided to tie a live bait in the form of a goat and sit up over it, as my stay on the Yellagiris could not exceed four days, as I had only that much leave. So the *Patel* offered to procure one for me from the same neighbouring village where he had got them the last time, but said that it would cost a tidy sum of money—about twenty rupees—as not only were goats scarce on the Yellagiris but their owners in that village, which was about three miles away, had become aware of the demand and had raised their prices accordingly. I agreed and handed over the money, and in the time that it would take for the goat to be brought, went down to my farm to see how things were getting along.

At noon, after consuming the cold lunch I had brought with me from Bangalore, I returned to the *Patel's* village only to find that the goat had not yet arrived.

It was two in the afternoon before the man who had been sent to fetch the animal returned with a black goat that was rather old, in the

sense that it was past the stage where it would bleat for a long time when left alone, and so help to attract the panther. Secondly, as I have said, it was a black goat. Black or white goats occasionally cause suspicion among certain panthers. A brown bait, whether goat, dog or bull, is generally the best to use, in that they resemble in colour the wild animals that form the panther's natural food. However, there was no time now to change the goat and I would have to make the best of circumstances.

The *Patel* and four or five men accompanied me, the latter carrying axes, ropes and the same *charpoy* I had used on the last occasion. We reached the village to which the girl had belonged in a little under an hour. There another couple of men joined my party, who offered to point out the exact spot at which the young woman had been killed.

It was perhaps three-quarters of a mile from the village. A stream, bearing a trickle of water, ran from west to east and skirted the base of Periamalai Hill perhaps a half-mile away. This stream was sandy and bordered by a thick outcrop of mixed lantana and wait-a-bit thorns. At the spot where the girl had been attacked a shallow hole had been dug by the villagers to form a pool for watering their cattle when the weather became dry and the rest of the stream ceased to flow. It was to this place that the girl had come for water when she had been killed the previous day. The lantana grew quite close to the pool, and it was evident that the man-eater had stalked her under cover of this thicket, and from there had made his final pounce.

As matters stood, this panther had again confirmed that he was most unusual in his habits, even for a man-eater. He had repeatedly attacked his human victim in broad daylight. Only tigers do this, as man-eating panthers, being inherent cowards at heart, usually confine their activities to the hours of darkness. I was inclined to think that this animal was perhaps already lying up in the thicket before the girl arrived and could not resist the temptation of a meal so readily offered.

With this idea in mind, I went down on hands and knees and began a close examination of the lantana bushes and the ground in the vicinity, where I shortly found confirmation of my theory, for one of the bushes provided ample shelter for a regular lie-up. Beneath it the carpet of dried lantana leaves rendered impossible the chance of finding any visible track, but a faintly prevailing odour of wild animal inclined me to confirm my guess as correct, and that the panther used this place now and then to lie up, as it offered ideal proximity for attack on any prey that might approach the pool to drink.

This was encouraging for, if the panther had used it before, there was every likelihood that he would use it again. Further, as I have already told you, Periamalai Hill lay about half a mile away. The

panther might have his regular den among the rocks and caves higher up the hill and would find this lantana lair a most convenient place in which to await the coming of an unsuspecting victim.

As I studied these conditions an idea suddenly came to me. I would create a scene as close as possible to what the panther might expect it to be. I would tether the goat to a stake beside the pool to make it appear like an animal that had come there to drink. And I would forestall the panther's arrival by hiding myself beneath that very same lantana bush. Should he hear the goat, or catch a glimpse of it from higher up the hill, from where it would be clearly visible, he would make straight for this point of attack and would find me waiting for him.

I explained my idea to the *Patel* and the men who had acompanied me. They thought it clever, but the *Patel* decided it was foolish, in that it entailed too great a risk. I convinced him that there was really little danger as, due to the denseness of the surrounding lantana and the thickness of the bush itself, the panther would have difficulty in getting at me from any of the sides or rear, and could only reach me through the entrance to this under-cover shelter, while I would be expecting him to arrive from that direction and would be ready. Further, his attention would be concentrated on the goat and he would scarcely suspect an enemy would await him in his own lair.

The stake which we had brought along was accordingly hammered deep into the sand with the aid of a stone from the streambed. I crept under the bush and took my time in making myself quite comfortable for the night. I also clamped the torch to the barrel of my rifle, and tested it to see that it was in good order. This torch I had lately purchased. It was a three-cell arrangement of the fixed-focus type. Finally, I took a long drink of tea from my water-bottle before ordering the men to tether the goat to the stake by its hind legs.

While all these preliminaries were going on the goat had been kept some distance away, so that it should not come to know that a human being was sheltering in the bushes so close by; for once it knew that, there was very little chance of it bleating from a sense of loneliness. On the other hand, if the goat really felt it had been left alone, there was much more reason why it should cry out.

While the goat was being tied I remained perfectly silent. After finishing their job, the *Patel* and his men went away and I was left by myself to await what might happen.

It was hot and still beneath the lantana, and long before sunset it was quite dark where I was sitting. The goat had bleated a few times at the beginning and then had stopped. I could only hope that it would begin calling again when darkness fell. But I was sorely disappointed. Occasionally I had heard the sounds made by the goat

as it kicked and struggled against the tethering rope, but these had now lapsed into silence and I came to the inevitable conclusion that the damned animal had gone to sleep.

Of necessity, in my position I had to keep wide awake and alert the whole night and could not share the goat's slumbers. I envied that blasted goat.

Mosquitoes worried me, and insects of all kinds ran over my body. Bush mice, which are even smaller than the domestic variety, rustled the leaves and crept along the stems of the lantana. Once something long and soft slithered through the dry leaves and along the sides of the bush. It was a snake. Whether harmless or poisonous I could not know. I sat absolutely motionless in spite of the mosquitoes and insects, and the slithering died away.

The panther did not come. No sounds penetrated the silence under the bush, not even the calls of a night-bird. Time moved on its long and tedious course. The luminous hands of my wristwatch very slowly clocked the passing hours. I felt drowsy but dared not give in to my inclination to close my eyes even for a few fitful seconds. I tried to think of other things and other events to get my mind off the panther. The only thing I could think of was to damn the goat.

The greying light of a new day gradually filtered in, not even heralded by the call of a jungle fowl, peafowl, or any other bird. I came out of that bush the most disgusted man in the whole of India. The goat, which had been lying curled up and fast asleep by the stake, lazily got to its feet, stretched leisurely, wagged its stumpy tail and regarded me in a quizzical fashion as much as to say, 'Come now, who is the real goat, you or me?' Knowing the answer, I refrained from a spoken confession.

Instead, I untethered that wretched animal, which followed me back to the village where the *Patel* lived. That worthy, with the same party of men who had accompanied us the day before, was just about to set forth to see how I had fared. Telling him to return the black goat, I said that I would snatch a few hours' sleep and then go myself to find a more satisfactory bait. I went to my *kottai* and slept till noon.

I was feeling hungry when I awoke, so I opened a tin of salmon, which I ate with some bread I had brought with me from Bangalore. The bread had become rather dry, but was improved by the tinned butter I spread thickly upon it. This served to fill me for lunch. I had already set my portable Primus stove to boil water for tea and the beverage was indeed refreshing. While eating my lunch I brewed a second kettle of tea to put into my water-bottle. Gathering the necessary equipment for another night's vigil, I returned to the *Patel's* village. Fortunately the weather was warm as the previous night, so that an overcoat was unnecessary.

I took the *Patel* along with me to add force to my argument, and walked to the village where the goats were available. There, after some picking and choosing, followed by some red-hot bargaining, I was able to select a half-grown animal that was more likely to bleat. It was past 3.30 p.m. when we set out for the place where I had sat up the night before, but really there was no hurry, as the spot had already been selected and there was no *machan* to fix.

Before five o'clock I had crept into the bush, the new goat was tethered and the men were on their way back.

Hardly were they out of sight and earshot than the goat began to bleat, and he kept this up incessantly. I silently congratulated myself on my selection.

With evening it again became quite dark beneath the lantana, the goat called loudly and I waited expectantly for the panther. An hour passed. Then I heard an almost imperceptible rustle, the faintest sound of a dry twig being trodden upon, and I sensed the panther was coming. The crucial moment had almost arrived. Now I had to be careful not to shine the torch before the panther was fully in view. If I did so, I knew he would disappear. On the other hand, if I delayed too long, he might see me first and perhaps make a charge, or even vanish.

With all my senses at full stretch, I waited. There were no fresh rustlings or other sounds. Then I heard a faint hiss. Instinctively I knew the panther had seen or sensed me. He had curled back his lips in a snarl, preparatory to the growl that would most likely follow. That curling of his lips had occasioned the slight hissing sound I had heard. It was now or never. My thumb went down on the switch-button of the torch. Its beam sprang right into the twin reddish-white eyes of the panther. I could clearly see his face and chest perhaps ten feet away. Aiming quickly at the throat I pressed the trigger of the Winchester. The panther appeared to come forward a pace. Then he reared up on his hind legs, but not before my second bullet took him full in the chest. He fell over backwards out of sight and threshed the bushes for a few seconds. Next came the unmistakable gurgling sounds of a dying animal; then silence.

I waited another half-hour before deciding to take the risk of leaving the bush. I thought it reasonably safe to do so, as I was almost sure the panther was dead. Holding the cocked rifle before me, I crawled out of cover and stood beside the goat. My first impulse was to cut it loose and take it in tow along with me. Then the thought came to my mind that the panther I had fired at might not have been the man-eater after all, but just an ordinary animal. If that were so, I would need to exercise every precaution in returning to the *Patel's* village in the darkness and could not afford to hamper myself by

leading a goat that would necessarily distract my attention. So I left it where it was and set out for the *Patel's* abode, where I arrived after slow and cautious walking. The people were still awake and I told them what had happened. Then I went to my *kottai* for a sound night's sleep.

Next morning we found the panther where he had fallen. An old male, with a somewhat craggy and pale coat, he showed every sign of being the man-eater, for his canine teeth were worn down with old age and his claws were blunt and frayed.

But only time would tell whether I had bagged the real culprit.

By noon I was on my way down the hill with his pelt.

Many years have elapsed since that incident took place, but no more people have been killed on either the Yellagiri or Javadi ranges, and so I am reasonably sure I succeeded that night in bringing the man-eater to bag.

Three

Old Munuswamy and the Panther of Magadi

THE TOWN OF BANGALORE, WHERE I LIVE, LIES PRACTICALLY IN THE centre of a straight line drawn from the city of Madras, on the east coast of India bordering the Bay of Bengal, to the town of Mangalore, on the west coast bordering the Arabian Sea. Bangalore is on a plateau just over three thousand feet above mean sea level. Nobody who has lived there can ever forget its; unique climate—neither too hot nor too cold, and neither too rainy nor too dry—with lovely misty mornings in the cold weather, from November to the middle of February, and with bracing cool mornings even in summer. The name, Bangalore, is an Anglicised version of the Kanarese words 'bengal uru' meaning 'bean town' as translated literally, whence it has become known as the 'city of beans'; and nobody who has eaten them can ever forget Bangalore's luscious fruits and vegetables of both tropical and European varieties.

Bangalore was far from being a city until the end of the Second World War, when its strategic military position, its great potential to grow into a large industrial city, and all its other assets have joined together to make it the most popular place in India. Following a wide influx of refugees both during and after the war, it has trebled its population, has become highly industrialised and is now a fast-growing city.

But this is not going to be a description of the merits of Bangalore; it was merely to say that I live in a very beautiful city. Bangalore is built on a number of hills, and if you stand on any one of them and

look around, you will see three very high hills on the horizon, respectively to the north, the northwest and the west. They are all within a radius of thirty-five miles and each is above four thousand feet in height. The hill to the north is the highest. It is really not one but three hills, consisting of three peaks together which make up the Nundydroog group. 'Droog' means 'hill fortress', and the easternmost of these three peaks is crowned by the remains of an old fort, still in a good state of repair, built by that redoubtable Mahommedan warrior Tippoo Sultan, the 'Tiger of Mysore'. It embraces a point overlooking a sheer drop of some 600 feet. This is known as 'Tipoo's Drop', because it was here that this hoary soldier dispensed with those who annoyed him by making them walk, blindfolded, on a narrow swaying plank out over the abyss. If they could walk to the end of the plank and return, they were spared. There seems to be no record of anyone accomplishing this feat. Perhaps the plank swayed too much—or maybe it was made to sway too much. Who knows? Historians are not very clear on this point.

To the northwest of Bangalore is the hill called Sivanaganga. It has a temple at the summit and is a place of pilgrimage for Hindus. It also has a well at the top that is said to be so deep that it is bottomless. Another version is that this well is the beginning of a secret underground passage running all the thirty-five miles to Bangalore.

The third hill to the west is known as Magadi Hill. Viewed from the rising ground in Bangalore it appears to be sugar-loaded in shape; but when you get there you find it has two humps like a dromedary. Between them is a heavily-wooded valley difficult to enter, for the approaches are slippery; if you should slip, you will not end much better off than did those blindfolded prisoners with whom Tippoo amused himself on Nundydroog.

This is the valley that brings me to the beginning of the story, for it was here that the panther that terrorized Magadi was said to have his cave.

Magadi hill is surrounded by gorgeously wooded and hilly country. To the south lies a stretch of reserved forest, covering a series of hills, extending southwards for over seventy miles to the Cauvery river, near a place called Sangam. Not all of this area is reserved forest, but a large part is, while the rest is thickly covered with scrub jungle. About midway down this line of hills, and between the towns of Closepet and Kankanhalli, the peaks cluster particularly high and closely, and the area swarms with panthers. This hunting ground is my son, Donald's, particular paradise. He has shot forty panthers there and over a dozen bear, I think, and he is little more than twenty-three years old.

To the west of Magadi hill are plains of low scrub. Black-buck,

hare, peafowl, partridge and quail abound. The hills continue to the north, but there they are much lower. To the east lies more hilly country, and Bangalore, about thirty-five miles away. The Arkravarthy river, a comparatively small stream, crosses the road to Bangalore near the twenty-three milestone, and it has been dammed just there. The catchment area is big enough to ensure an ample supply of water to Bangalore throughout the driest year. This dam is known as Tippagondahalli, and huge pumps send the water the remaining twenty-three miles to Bangalore.

There you have the full setting of the country where this leopard first appeared. It must not be thought that there is anything special about this animal because I have used the name 'leopard'. A leopard and a panther are one and the same creature. For no good reason that I know of, in India we more often call them panthers.

The events that I am going to relate took place before the last war.

This panther killed some goats and a village cur or two at some of the few scattered hamlets that lie at the foot of Magadi hill. Nobody took much notice of him, for panthers had been doing that sort of thing in that part of the country for generations and generations of panthers and the people have grown up with them.

Time passed and he grew more confident of himself. He killed some young bulls—and some cows too.

Now the bull is a sacred animal in India and no Hindu will touch his flesh. Nevertheless, the bull does all the hard work. He ploughs the fields and he draws the bullock-carts. He even turns the huge stone wheels that grind *chunam* or limestone. But with all his many uses and considerable value, people do not begrudge a panther eating one of their bulls now and again—provided he does not become too greedy. But when he goes in for killing cows—which supply milk and butter, from whence comes ' ghee', which is melted butter and a cooking medium used throughout the length and breadth of the country and of much value—he commits an unpardonable offence and it is high time something is done.

In Bangalore there lives—and I use the present tense because he is still there—an individual named 'Munuswamy', who claims to be a professional 'gentleman's *shikari*' guide. He is also a rogue. He brings in items of *shikar* news to town and passes them on to novices and greenhorns in the game. 'Master, there is herd of forty wild pigs can shoot near Whitefield, only twelve miles away.' Or, 'Master, on tenth mile on Magadi Road and eighteenth mile on road to Mysore City there plenty herds of black bucks got, fifty animals in each, which master very easily can shoot.' He demands a reasonable advance of money for the information, and should he turn up on the day appointed to accompany the novice to the place, the latter generally

wonders what has become of those many wild pigs and blackbuck that were said to abound. But do not underestimate Munuswamy for a moment. He is quick-witted and a ready liar. 'See, master,' he will say, 'I told you come soon long time back. You no come. Only yesterday big crowd military officer *sahibs* come in car. Them shoot two pigs. All run away now. Master come again another day, eh?'

Wild pigs and blackbuck are only 'chicken feed' to Munuswamy. To see him at his best is to watch him bringing news of a panther to some unfortunate greenhorn who is about to learn the lesson of his life. He will present himself at the gate of the bungalow, or accost the *sahib* on the road, with somethihg like this: 'Sar, me big gentleman-*shikari*-guide. Me show master blackbucks, wild pigs, peacocks, hares, partridge and green pigeons. Or master like snipes and wild ducks? Them come plenty, plenty in December month—Kistmiss time got. Master like shoot very very big panther? Him large one got. Only fifteen miles from here, Kankanhalli road. Master give fifteen chips advance, me tie live donkey. Panther kill donkey, me come tell Master. Me also build *machan* very fine. Master shoot panther very easy.'

The novice is astounded. Only fifteen rupees for a live-bait? A panther only fifteen miles away? Who said hunting was an expensive or difficult hobby?

So the fifteen rupees are handed over to Munuswamy, who then remembers that master must give him another two rupees towards his food and three rupees for bus charge, when he brings master news of the kill. The greenhorn thinks this is very reasonable and forks out another five rupees. Munuswamy goes away most contented.

His first call is at one of the many local toddy-shops. He drinks only 'toddy' and eschews spirits in the form of '*arrack*', which he says is too strong for him anyhow. But he drinks three bottles of toddy. This is the fermented juice of the coconut palm. Then old Munuswamy goes into a deep sleep.

The next day he wakes up and sets about the business of baiting the 'panther' in right earnest.

In Bangalore there are two animal 'pounds' for stray cattle, dogs and donkeys. The official charge for reclaiming your donkey, if it has been so impounded, is one rupee. After an interval of about ten days, unclaimed animals are sold by public auction to repay part of the expenses incurred in feeding them during those ten days. These auctions take place about twice a week, and it is a very simple matter for Munuswamy to attend one of them and purchase a donkey for about two rupees. Or he may even wrongfully pose as the owner of one of the impounded animals and claim possession of it. After all, one donkey looks much alike another, and there is no means by which

the official in charge can test the truth of Munuswamy's claim, particularly if he sends a friend or agent to make it.

So Munuswamy gets the donkey, for which the *sahib* paid him fifteen rupees, for only two rupees, thereby making a profit of thirteen rupees, representing a potential 650 per cent on his initial outlay. A good beginning indeed.

Then he sets out on a long walk of some miles to wherever he has told the *sahib* the panther is to be found and ties the donkey there for a couple of days. Early in the morning of the third day or so he kills the donkey himself. This is how he does it. He has one of those huge penknives that incorporate about a dozen appurtenances, among them a round sharp-pointed instrument originally intended to be used, I believe, for removing stones from horses' hooves. At least this is what I am told, but I am not quite sure myself. With this crude instrument, he stabs the unfortunate animal in its jugular vein, and when it falls down, he stabs it again, making four wounds in all, two on each side of the throat. With the blade end of the same pen-knife he cuts open the belly, scatters the entrails about and tears off some chunks of flesh from the outer skin. Then he covers the carcass with branches. Lastly, he removes from a dirty bag he has brought with him a mysterious object. Can you guess what it is? This is Munuswamy's ace trick. It is a panther's paw, crudely stuffed with straw. With this he makes a series of 'pug-marks' here and there.

With the scene set to his expert satisfaction, for a few annas Munuswamy thumbs a lift to town in a lorry, and in great excitement summons the *sahib*. The greenhorn becomes excited too. In frantic haste he makes the 'missus' prepare sandwiches for him and tea for his thermos flask, while he himself cleans his rifle, assembles rounds, torchlight, batteries and a number of other odds and ends—most of which he never uses and are quite useless anyhow. Then away he drives with Munuswamy at high speed to the place where, the 'panther' has 'killed'.

Munuswamy points out the 'pug-marks' on the ground and the panther's 'teeth-marks' on the donkey's throat, and the *sahib* is convinced. He also arranges a *machan* to be tied, using two coolies to do so, for whose services he charges two rupees each, though he pays them only twelve annas. Finally, before the *sahib* ascends, he strikes a bargain. If master shoots the panther, he must give Munuswamy twenty rupees *baksheesh*. If master misses—that is master's own fault —he must give his faithful retainer ten rupes. If the panther does not turn up—master should not forget that panthers are very, very cunning animals and sometimes don't return to a kill—well, he, Munuswamy has worked very hard in the hot sun for master's sake and must get five rupees. The bargain is struck.

Strangely enough, Munuswamy trusts master, just as much as he expects master to trust him.

Well, the panther doesn't come—for the best of reasons: there is no panther. Munuswamy takes care to pocket his five rupees first, then consoles master by reminding him that panthers are unpredictable creatures and that this one might come next time. He offers to tie another donkey. And so the story goes on and on, till the greenhorn abandons the idea even of seeing one of these most elusive creatures and decides to confine his attention to wild duck or partridge. Even here, Munuswamy is still useful.

You may ask me: 'How do you know all this about Munuswamy?' I was such a greenhorn once and he 'had' me no less than four times. One day an accident occurred—for Munuswamy. He was pointing out the 'pug-marks' to me. A stray cur had been watching us interestedly and suddenly darted into a bush and came out carrying a cloth bag. Munuswamy, in great consternation, gave chase. The dog ran and something spotted dropped out of the bag. Munuswamy rushed for it and so did I. It was a panther's stuffed foot. Then, at the threat of the most violent death—even more violent than the donkey's—he related his *modus operandi* to me in detail, much as I have told you.

I am a long-suffering individual and believe in the adage to 'live and let live'. If there are greenhorns as foolish as I was, just waiting to be 'plucked'—well, why should Munuswamy not pluck them? So, I have never spoilt his game and Munuswamy rather likes me.

Don't think that, by telling you this, I am spoiling his game now, for Munuswamy assumes a different name each time he presents himself to a new recruit to the band of hunters that abound in Bangalore. He may be Ramiah, *Poojah*, Pooniah, or have a hundred aliases. But in case you should come to Bangalore at any time and aspire to join our ranks, I will give you one hint about him—a casual description. If an English-speaking 'gentleman's *shikari*-guide' presents himself to you—a lean, tall, oldish, very black man, with long hair drawn to the back of his head and tied in a knot, and large protruding eyes, whether he is wearing a turban or cap, *dhoti, lungothi* or baggy trousers or shorts, and even if he says his name is Jack Johnson, keep far from him and lock your purse up safely in a drawer. As likely as not it is my old friend Munuswamy, the happy-go-lucky 'crooked' guide.

In talking about this individual, I am aware that you may think I have strayed very far from my story. But really I have not, because he plays quite a prominent part at the beginning and at the end of it. And I am sure you have enjoyed making the acquaintance of this quite unusual and unique character, anyway.

This Munuswamy had come to hear about the activities of the

panther that had begun killing bulls and cows in the Magady Hill area. Do not imagine that, although Munuswamy invariably manufactured his own panthers, he did not know anything about real ones. He did. In years gone by, when he was younger and times were not so hard, he had been a genuine *shikari* himself and knew a good deal about these animals. So when the information reached him, he went to Magadi by bus and made a first-hand investigation, during which he came to understand the panther had been killing goats and cattle rather frequently.

You will appreciate that because of his methods and the strange fact that nobody who went out shooting with Munuswamy ever saw a panther, and very rarely saw anything else, his reputation as a guide was getting somewhat tarnished. More than half the homes of gentlemen *shikaris*, both European and Indian, whether experienced or novices, were fast closed to him. This was a very deplorable state of affairs for Munuswamy and reacted directly on his exchequer and consequently upon his stomach. The time had come to remedy it and vindicate himself.

The fact that the panther was killing boldly and frequently should make him easy to bag, and it awoke Munuswamy's latent hunting instincts. He decided that he would shoot the animal and then advertise the fact in town by a procession, in which the panther would be taken around the streets of Bangalore on a bullock-cart to the tune of tom-toms. Even better than that, Munuswamy would have his photograph taken with the panther and present copies to such of his clients as were still on speaking terms. To those who were not he would post copies. On the back of each he would have a short statement to the effect that *shikari* Munuswamy had shot this panther on such and such a day, at such and such a place, because the *sahibs* who had come with him had been unable to do so, in spite of all the help he had given them.

The more he thought of it, the more old Munuswamy thrilled to the idea. That would give them something to think about. And it would give a tremendous fillip to his waning reputation.

Having sold his own gun long ago, he somehow contrived to borrow an old hammer-model .12 bore double-barrelled weapon. Then he revisited the scene and told the villagers that he, Munuswamy the old *shikari*, who had once served with generals and viceroys, had come to shoot the animal that was causing them such loss. He said he intended to live in the village of Magadi, which is situated about four miles northwest of the hill from which it takes its name, and told them to bring him news immediately if any of their animals were killed.

Two days later the news came that the panther had killed another cow. Taking the solitary ball cartridge, and the three others containing

L.G. shot that he had borrowed with the gun, Munuswamy repaired to the spot, tied his *machan* and shot the panther high up in the shoulder with the ball cartridge. The L.G. in the other barrel—for he had fired both barrels together to make certain—helped to pepper him too, but the panther got away nevertheless. Reviewing the situation later, Munuswamy decided he was too advanced in years to follow wounded panthers. Moreover, the advantages he might get out of the 'propaganda stunt' that had fired his imagination did not now appear to weigh sufficiently against the dangers of following up the blood trail left by the panther. So he decided to call it a day and returned to Bangalore.

Weeks passed, and then the old story, which invariably begins the same way, took its usual course. A panther began to attack dogs and goats outside some of the villages situated beside the twenty-two miles of roadway that stretches outwards from Magadi to Closepet. In two instances the people in charge of the herds had tried to save their goats and had been attacked. A man and a boy had been mauled in this way.

Then a *jutka*-man and his pony entered the picture. Three persons had detrained one night at Closepet railway station from the night train from Mysore. As there was no bus service at that hour, these three men had decided to travel to their destination, a village ten miles from Closepet, by *jutka*. A *jutka*, for those of you who are unfamiliar with the word, is a two-wheeled vehicle covered by an elliptical roof of matting reinforced with bamboos, and is drawn by a small breed of pony especially reared for the purpose. *Jutka* ponies resemble the ordinary village 'tat', except that they have shorter manes and shorter tails.

The *jutka* arrived at its destination and unloaded its passengers. The driver decided to sleep in the village and return to Closepet the next morning. He unharnessed his pony and fed it with some of the dried grass he carried in a gunny-bag, slung just below the floor of the vehicle. Then he went to sleep.

The pony evidently finished the grass and began to stray along the village street, hoping to find some more growing there. In this way it came to the outskirts of the village, which was after all a tiny place.

From the back of the last hut along the street something sprang up suddenly against its side, and began to tear at its throat. Neighing shrilly, the pony galloped back up the street. The something that had attacked it had tried to hold on, but had lost its grip on the pony's throat and fallen off, but not before it had inflicted a nasty wound. That something had been the panther.

The sounds made by the terror-stricken pony and the growls of the panther awoke the jutka-owner, who saw his animal rushing towards

him. It halted, quivering with fright, blood pouring from its throat. He raised an immediate alarm.

The pony could not haul the *jutka*; so next day the owner walked it back to Closepet, where he reported the matter to the police. News spread and it became known that the area was threatened by a panther that might any day become a man-eater.

Shortly afterwards a man was pounced upon within two miles of Magadi village itself and badly mauled. Villagers, tending their fields some distance away, rushed to the rescue and found him on the ground, severely bitten and raked by the animal's sharp claws. They carried him into Magadi, and to the Local Fund Hospital there, for attention. A police report was made, and the local police *daffedar*, whose rank is about equivalent to that of a sergeant, being the most senior officer in the village and in charge of the police *chowki* or station, set out to make an on-the-spot examination of the evidence given, accompanied by a constable with a bicycle.

He was taken to the place at which the ryots had picked up the injured man. While he was looking at the blood marks and pug-tracks, and perhaps making copious notes in the way that policemen do, somebody looked up and said they could see the panther lying on a rocky outcrop at the top of a small hillock, hardly two furlongs away. The *daffedar* saw him, borrowed his constable's bicycle, and pedalled furiously back to the village for one of the three service-rifles that formed the entire police armoury there.

Though he pedalled furiously back, by the time he reached the place, his constable and one or two villagers who had remained, said the panther had disappeared over the top of the hill. The villagers told the *daffedar* that if he cared to make a detour around the hillock—the distance wasn't very great—he might yet be able to cut the panther off on the other side.

The *daffedar* was nothing if not keen and brave, and, taking one of the villagers along to indicate the short cut, hastened around the hill, loading a single 303 round into the weapon he carried. The constabulary in India are armed with rifles of the same type as the military, with the only difference that the magazines are generally removed, so that only one shell at a time can be fired, thus preventing a trigger-happy copper from using his weapon overenthusiastically at a time of riot of local disturbance. For this reason, the *daffedar* had only one round to fire with, and two or three others in his pocket.

They came to the other side of the hill, but they found no signs of the panther. Many boulders were scattered about, and the villager suggested they ascend the hill a little, as the panther was probably around somewhere. This they did, and from between or from behind some rocks the panther emerged. The *daffedar* was taken by surprise

and fired from his hip, missing completely. The next second saw him on the ground with the panther on top, biting and clawing at his chest and arms. His companion was in full flight down the hill.

After the few seconds during which it had vented its rage, the panther, which had not yet become a man-eater, left the wounded policeman and sprang back to the shelter of the rocks whence he had come. The badly hurt *daffedar* lay where the beast had left him.

Meanwhile the fleeing villager ran back to the constable and the other villagers and told them what had happened. The constable leaped upon his bicycle and made for the police station in the village, where he summoned the other three members of the local force and told them their *daffedar* had probably been killed.

Taking the remaining two rifles from their racks, and two 'lathis' in addition, the four representatives of the law hastened back to the hill, being reinforced as they went along with more and more villagers. A party of over ten people finally picked up the *daffedar*, who was in a bad way, and carried him back to the Local Fund Hospital. The next day an ambulance was sent for from Bangalore, which conveyed him to the Victoria Hospital in the city.

The reports of the panther's various attacks had all been registered, but when he attacked one of their own force—and a *daffedar* at that—the police really got busy. It did not take them very long to find out who had been the root of all this trouble, and at this stage, old Munuswamy, the rascally *shikari* guide, re-entered the scene.

The police caught him. Witnesses had testified that he had built a *machan* and sat up for the panther. They also said he had wounded it. To have done that he must have used a firearm. Did he have one? Did he possess an Arms Licence? Was he hiding an unlicensed weapon? Did he borrow it? Who from? Why? When? Where? Did the owner have a licence? How many cartridges did he take?

There were a hundred-and-one questions to answer. Altogether, poor Munuswamy could see he was in for a bad time. The number of charges against him, culminating with the statement that if the *daffedar* died from his wounds he might be charged with 'potential manslaughter',—filled a page and would undoubtedly send him to jail for a long, long time.

Then Munuswamy's inborn initiative came to his rescue and he made his greatest bargain. He undertook to shoot the panther within four days and lay the body at the feet of the district Superintendent of Police (D.S.P.). If he failed, the police could do as they liked with him. If he succeeded, the charges should be forgotten.

The D.S.P., being a practical officer, was more interested in having the panther shot than in prosecuting Munuswamy. For it was obvious that this animal was well on the way to becoming a man-eater;

whereas Munuswamy, with all his rascally ways, was unlikely to rise to such heights of evil fame. So the D.S.P. gave him just four days and let him out of the lock-up.

The same afternoon I heard a voice persistently calling, 'sar, sar', at my front door. It was Munuswamy. With tears rolling down his cheeks —how he got them to flow so instantaneously is a secret which he has not yet confided to me—he related his whole tale of woe from beginning to end, and all the information that he knew or had been able to gather about this panther, much as I have told the story here.

He had just four days in which to shoot the panther, he insisted, failing which he would go to 'big, big jail' as he termed it. Laughingly I asked him why he did not run away. The idea had occurred to him, he admitted, but where else throughout the length and breadth of India would he be able to find such sporting *sahibs* who gave him money so freely; such obliging auctions where he could pick up live donkeys for as little as two rupees; and, oh! the many other advantages which come with living in Bangalore. The old man broke down at these thoughts and his tears flowed faster than ever. I would not have been surprised to learn that a few of them were genuine.

Would I please help him by shooting this panther? I would be saving him, and oh! so many other people that it might yet kill.

I conceded the latter point, but I told Munuswamy frankly that I wasn't too interested in the former. He was not offended. I said I would help him on one condition: that, as he had undoubtedly been the root of all the trouble, he would have to be beside me and not run away when the panther was shot.

The old boy actually smiled as he agreed. Strangely, his tears had vanished entirely.

That very evening I took him down to the house of the D.S.P., to whom I laughingly recounted the circumstances under which Munuswamy had presented himself. I told the police officer that I did not know if he had really been serious in allowing Munuswamy a reprieve of four days in which to kill the panther, but I pointed out that if this was so, such a time-limit was an encumbrance, as I wanted the old rogue with me to assist, and it would be a nuisance if the police butted in on the fifth day and took him away.

The D.S.P. replied that he had really meant to give him only four days in which to fulfil his undertaking, but in view of what I said he would not interfere so long as I went ahead and tried to bag this animal. He also helped by handing me a letter, calling upon all police officials to whom I might show it to render me every assistance.

Of course I did not tell this to Munuswamy. That would have made him relax his efforts. Instead, I mentioned that the D.S.P. *sahib* was beginning to regret having allowed him as long as four days and

wanted to cut them down to three, but that I had interceded on his behalf and saved the situation in the nick of time.

This made Munuswamy more grateful to me than ever, and as impatient to be off on our trip. In the Studebaker we reached Magadi Hill early the next morning and started making inquiries at the various hamlets at its foot, including the place at which Munuswamy had wounded the panther. Asking questions as we went along, we worked our way right up to Magadi village itself, where I spoke to the police constables who had rescued their *daffedar*. Thence we set off in the car along the road to Closepet, stopping at each wayside village to ask questions. In this way we came to the village where the panther had attacked the pony, and eventually to Closepet town itself, where the Sub-Inspector of Police, to whom I showed the note given me by the D.S.P., immediately sent for the *jutka*-man. I interrogated him and he told me what had happened to his pony.

It took until late that evening to ask all these questions, but in spite of them I had found nobody who appeared to know where the panther was likely to be living, or his particular habits. Of course, I knew there was no hurry, but Munuswamy's dark countenance was even more haggard when he realised that one out of his four days of grace had passed already with no substantial results.

We came back to Magadi village that night and slept in the travellers' bungalow.

Early next morning a skinny-looking individual presented himself and stated that he earned a living gathering honey from the hives on the surrounding hills, by collecting herbs and other medicinal roots, and by snaring hare, partridge and quail when he got the opportunity. He said he had been told the night before that I had been around with Munuswamy, seeking information about the panther, and he had come to report that he was almost certain the animal lived in a cave in the recesses of the cleft between the two hummocks of Magadi Hill.

I asked him what made him so certain of this. He replied that some weeks earlier he had been there to collect herbs and had observed that an animal, dripping blood, had crossed some rocks, leaving a distinct trail. Following cautiously, he had found panther pug-marks where the animal had left the rocks. He had then stopped following. Later, he came to know that on the previous day someone had wounded a panther not far away. That somebody had been Munuswamy.

He knew of the cave, having taken honey from beehive in its vicinity many times in the past. A couple of days previously, just after the *daffedar* had been atacked but before my informant had come to hear of it himself through having been away for a week at Closepet, he had approached the cave to see if the bees had begun to build again. He was some distance away from it when an animal had

growled at him. Remembering at once the blood-trail he had found weeks earlier, he had left the valley as fast as he could.

This was news indeed.

I started asking questions, and he undertook to lead me to the cave, provided that I was prepared to creep on hands and knees for a furlong or so through the dense lantana that led to the valley and the cave.

I agreed and told Munuswamy that the time had come for him to fulfil his part of the bargain, which was to accompany me and be in at the killing of the panther, to atone for his sin in having wounded it in the first place.

If I had expected him to show fear, I was mistaken. The police had so terrified him that he was more afraid of the remaining three days running out without bagging our quarry than of facing any panther.

I waited for the sun to become hot, while I ate a leisurely 'chota hazri'. This was in order to allow the panther time to fall asleep for the day within his cave. If I arrived there too early, he might hear me coming and beat a retreat.

We left the bungalow by car at exactly ten o'clock and in less than fifteen minutes reached a point on the road almost opposite the valley between the two hummocks of the hill. The lean man, who had given his name as Allimuthu, indicated that we should have to get out. I parked the car in the shade of a tree just off the road and the three of us got down. I worked the under-lever of my rifle, just to check that it was moving freely. Then Allimuthu, Munuswamy and I set off for the cave.

The hill is about two miles from the road. We reached the base and started climbing towards the valley, which was no longer visible, because of the trees around us. Over their tops I could just see the summits of the two hillocks above, and to the right and left of us.

We climbed for an hour and it was a stiff ascent. Then we came to a veritable sea of lantana bushes which had entirely enveloped the trees and the lesser jungle. This was the place. Alimuthu indicated, where we would have to crawl through and under the lantana for some distance.

I can assure you that covering the next furlong or so of ground was a strenuous effort. We were perspiring and scratched by thorns already as it was. Allimuthu crawled ahead; I followed closely, and Munuswamy was even closer behind. By the time we negotiated that lantana-belt we were dripping with sweat and my khaki shirt and pants were torn in many places. I am sure I left small portions of my face, neck and hands hanging from many of the barbed hooks that serrate each branch of lantana shrub.

We eventually broke free of the belt and entered the valley

between the hummocks. It was strewn with boulders everywhere, covered to half their height by spear-grass. Allimuthu whispered that the cave was to the left and about three-fourths of the distance along the valley. It was an impossible place in which to spot a panther, even at a short distance. A dozen tigers would have been equally invisible there.

I took the lead now, with Allimuthu behind and Munuswamy immediately behind him. I kept to the right and skirted the foot of the right-hand hummock, so that if the panther charged from the cave, or any cover to our left, I should have a chance to see it coming. We drew opposite the cave. There was an overhanging cleft in the rock above it. I noticed that this rock was pitted with barnacles of wax that had been the sites of old honeycombs, although there appeared to be no fresh ones. The inside of the cavern was hidden by the long grass and piles of rocks that lay scattered outside it, many of which had apparently rolled down the hillside from above.

Then we heard it. An unmistakable growl. Allimuthu reached out to touch my shoulder to stop me, but I had already caught the sound.

It might have been made by a panther—or it might have been made by a bear.

I stopped to think. There were two courses open to me. There was no doubt that the sound had come from in front: from the cave or some place very close to it. I could throw stones or advance a little closer. I felt afraid to follow the latter course. The creature, whatever it was, could rush down upon me from the higher level of the cavern. If I failed to see it coming between the grass and rocks, or missed it with my first shot, I could expect real trouble.

Discretion got the better of valour and I whispered to Allimuthu and Munuswamy to hurl stones in that direction. They did so.

Nothing happened.

With my rifle cocked and ready, I watched for the slightest movement in the scene before me.

They hurled more stones, but still nothing happened.

Then I noticed a slight movement of the long grass away to the right, leading up the hill, beyond the side of the cavern where it adjoined the sloping ground behind.

That movement might have been caused by the breeze or by some animal slinking through the grass. Of one thing I was certain, it was definitely not a bear. Bruin is black in southern India, and I would easily have picked out such a black object against the brown grass. Nor for that matter could Bruin sneak about in such fashion—not even if he tried. He is a blundering type, who either bursts upon a scene or bursts away from it.

I strained my eyes and then saw part of the spotted shape as it

drew level with the height of the rock that overhung the cavern.

The animal had stopped moving now and was undoubtedly looking back at us, although I could not make out its head or face in the grass. A couple of seconds more and it might be gone.

I covered that spotted patch in my sights and gently pressed the trigger.

The panther shot up and out of the grass, bent up double like a prawn, and then rolled backwards down the slope and was hidden from view in the grass. Scrambling upon a boulder, I tried to look down and see him. There was nothing to be seen.

I waited for ten minutes; then I crept forward, after motioning to Allimuthu and Munuswamy to take cover. Every now and then I leaped on to a boulder to see if I could catch a glimpse of the animal.

Eventually I did, and all my caution was unnecessary, for the panther was quite dead. That snap shot of mine had been a lucky one. The .405 bullet had passed through the back of his neck and into his skull.

Examination showed where the ball from Munuswamy's gun had travelled clean through the animal's back, high up and behind the shoulder-blades. It had made a big hole in leaving and had caused a nasty open wound in which maggots were crawling. Two L.G. pellets were embedded in the skin, but the wounds caused by them appeared to be healing. The main wound, however, would eventually have caused the animal's death, if it had not made him a man-eater before then. This was a middle-aged male, just under seven feet in length.

We had a lot of trouble lugging his body through that infernal lantana thicket, but we made it after more toil and sweat.

That evening we laid the body before the D.S.P's feet. Exactly forty-eight hours had passed since I had asked him to extend the time limit of four days. But Munuswamy and I had accomplished the task in half that time. The D.S.P. was all smiles.

Four

The Black Panther of Sivanipalli

SIVANIPALLI HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FAVOURITE HAUNT OF MINE BECAUSE of its proximity to Bangalore and the fact that it lends itself so conveniently to a weekend excursion or even a visit of a few hours on a moonlit night. All you have to do is to motor from Bangalore to Denkanikotta, a distance of forty-one miles, proceed another four miles by car, and then leave the car and walk along a footpath for five miles, which brings you to Sivanipalli. The hamlet itself stands at the edge of the Reserved Forest.

Nearly three miles to the west of this small hamlet the land drops for about three hundred feet, down to a stream running along the decline. To the south of the hamlet another stream flows from the east to west, descending rapidly in a number of cascades to converge with the first stream that runs along the foot of the western valley. To the east of Sivanipalli itself the jungle stretches to a forest lodge, Gulhatti Bungalow, situated nearly five hundred feet up on a hillside. East of Gulhatti itself, and about four and a half miles away as the crow flies, is another forest bungalow at a place called Aiyur. Four miles northeast again there is a Forestry Department shed located near a rocky hill named Kuchuvadi. This is a sandalwood area, and the shed houses an ancient huge pair of scales which are used for weighing the cut pieces of sandalwood as they are brought in from the jungle, before being despatched to the Forestry Department's godowns at the block headquarters at Denkanikotta.

Northwards of Sivanipalli, thick scrub jungle extends right up to and beyond the road, five miles away, where you have to leave the car, before setting out for the hamlet on foot.

Sivanipalli itself consists of barely half-a-dozen thatched huts and is hardly big enough to be called even a hamlet. A considerably larger village named Salivaram is found three miles to the north, just a little more than halfway along the footpath leading to the main road.

Fire-lines of the Forestry Department surround Sivanipalli on all four sides, demarcating the commencement of the surrounding reserved forest at distances varying from half a mile to a mile from the hamlet. There is a water hole almost at the point where two of these fire-lines converge at the southeastern corner. The two streams that meet the west of the village at the foot of the three-hundred-foot drop wind on through jungle in the direction of another larger village named Anchetty, about eight miles southwestward of Sivanipalli itself.

I have given this rather detailed description of the topography of the surrounding region to enable you to have in mind a picture of the area in which occurred the adventure I am about to relate.

It is an ideal locality for a panther's activities, with small rocky hills in all directions, scrub jungle, heavy forest and two streams—apart from the water hole—to ensure a steady water supply, not only for the panthers themselves, but for the game on which they prey. Because of this regular supply of water, a fairly large herd of cattle is quartered at Sivanipalli, which is an added attraction, of course, so far as these felines are concerned!

As a result, quite a number of panthers are more or less in permanent residence around the area. That is the main reason why I was attracted to Sivanipalli the first day I visited it in 1929.

The jungle varies in type from the heavy bamboo that grows in the vicinity of the water hole to the thick forest on the southern and western sides, with much thinner jungle and scrub, interspersed with sandalwood trees, to the east and north.

The countryside itself is extremely beautiful, with a lovely view of the hills stretching away to a hazy and serrated blue line on the western horizon. Banks of mist float up from the jungle early in the morning and completely hide the base of these hills, exposing their tops like rugged islands in a sea of fleecy wool. On a cloudy day, the opposite effect is seen, for when storm clouds settle themselves along the tops of the hills, entirely hiding them from view, only the lower portions of their slopes are visible, giving the impression of almost flat country.

I have spent many a moonlit night 'ghooming'—derived, from the Urdu verb 'ghoom', meaning 'to wander about'—the jungles around little Sivanipalli. They hold game of every description, with the

exception of bison, in moderate numbers. There is always the chance of encountering an elephant, hearing the soughing moan of a tiger, the grating sawing of a panther, or the crash of an alarmed sambar as it flees at your approach while you wander about the moonlit forest. You will not be able to see them—except perhaps the elephant, for both species of carnivora, and the sambar as well, are far too cunning and have long ago seen or heard you coming.

You may stumble upon a bear digging vigorously in the ground for white ants or tuber-roots, or sniffing and snuffling loudly as he ambles along. You will undoubtedly hear him, long before you see him as a black blob in the confused and hazy background of vegetation, looking grey and ghostly in the moonlight.

As far back as 1934 Sivanipalli sprang a surprise. A black panther had been seen drinking at the water hole by a herdsman returning with his cattle from the forest where he had taken them for the day to graze. It was shortly after five o'clock in the evening, which is the usual time for the cattle to be driven back to the pens in the village to be kraaled for the night. It is the custom to drive them out in the mornings to the jungle for the day's grazing at about nine, or even later, and to bring them back fairly early in the evening, the apparently late exodus and early return being to allow time for the cows to be milked twice a day.

Thus it was only a little after five and still quite light when the herdsman saw this black panther standing beside a bush that grew close to the water's edge, calmly lapping from the pool. He swore that it was jet black and I had no reason to disbelieve him, for there seemed no real point in a deliberate lie. When the herd approached, the panther had gazed up at the cattle; but when the herdsman appeared amidst his beasts it just melted away into the undergrowth.

Now the black panther is not a separate or special species. It is simply an instance of melanism. A black cub sometimes, but very rarely, appears in a litter, the other cubs being of normal size and colour. Black panthers are said to occur more in the thick evergreen forests of Malaya, Burma, Assam and similar localities than around this district. They have also been seen and shot very occasionally in the Western Ghats of India. I have every reason to believe the view that they prevail in these heavy evergreen forests, for then their dark colour would afford considerably better concealment. At the same time, as they are simple instances of melanism, they should occur anywhere and everywhere that panthers exist, regardless of the type of the jungle prevailing. I have only seen one other black panther in its wild state, and that was when it leapt across the road on the ghat section between Pennagram and Muttur near the Cauvery river, at about six one evening. They are one of Nature's—or rather the jungle's

—mysteries that has never been quite satisfactorily solved.

If you look closely at a black panther in a zoo, you will discover that the rosette markings of the normal panther are still visible through the black hair, although of course they cannot be seen very distinctly.

When the herdsman saw this black panther, he came to the village and told the people all about it. A black panther had never before been seen or heard of in this area and his tale was generally disbelieved. Having seen the animal with his own eyes, of course, he had no doubts, although he sincerely believed that it had not been a normal or living animal he had laid eyes upon but Satan in just one of the numerous forms he often adopts in the jungle to frighten poor villagers like himself.

Some weeks passed and no one saw or heard of the black panther again. The herdsman's story was forgotten.

One day, some months later, in mid-afternoon, with the sun shining brightly overhead, another herd of cattle was taking its siesta, squatting with closed eyes or lazily munching the grass in the shade of neighbouring trees. The beasts lay in little groups of two to half-a-dozen. The two herdsmen had finished their midday meal of *ragi* balls and curry, which they had brought along with them, tied up in a dirty piece of cloth, and were fast asleep, lying side by side in the shade of another tree.

It was indeed a peaceful scene, as from an azure sky the tropical sun sent down its fiery rays that were reflected from the earth in waves of shimmering heat. The herd of cattle was relaxed, drowsy and unwatchful when the black panther of Sivanipalli took his first toll.

Appearing unexpectedly, the panther fastened his fangs in the throat of a half-grown brown and white cow, but not before she had time to bellow with pain and leap to her feet, lifting her assailant off the ground with his teeth locked in her throat.

The cow's agonized cry awakened one of the sleeping herdsmen, who was astounded by what he saw. He awoke his companion to look upon the Devil himself in an unexpected black form, and they watched as the stricken cow dropped to earth to ebb out her life, kicking wildly. The black panther maintained his grip. Thus she died. The men had leapt to their feet.

Ordinarily, in the event of an attack by a panther on one of their cattle, they would have rushed to its rescue, brandishing their staves and shouting at he tops of their voices, if not actually to save the life of the victim, at least to drive off the attacker before he could drag away the kill.

In this case neither of them found the nerve to do so. They just stood rooted to the spot and gazed in astonishment. As they did so,

the panther released his hold on the throat of the dead cow and looked in their direction. Although he was some fifty yards away they could clearly see the crimson blood gushing from the cow's torn throat and dyeing the muzzle of the panther a deep scarlet against the black background of fur.

They turned tail and fled.

When the few villagers of Sivanipalli heard this account, they were very reluctant to go out and bring back the carcase before it was wholly eaten. This they would most certainly have done had the killer been a normal panther, but the presence of this unheard-of black monstrosity completely unnerved them. They had been told of a panther described as being jet black by the herdsman who had first seen him at the water hole. Being villagers themselves, they had allowed a wide margin for exaggeration in that case, but here were two more herdsmen, both saying the same thing. Could it be really true?

After that day, the black marauder began to exact a regular toll of animals from Sivanipalli. He was seen on several occasions, so that there was no more doubt in the minds of any of the villagers as to his actual existence and colour.

When the people came to know of his presence in the jungle, forcibly brought home to them by these frequent attacks on their animals, even their usual lethargy and apathy was shaken and they became more and more careful. Eventually a stage was reached when the cattle were not driven out to graze beyond a radius of about a quarter of a mile from the village.

Finding that his food supply was being cut off, the black panther started to extend his field of operation. He killed and ate animals that belonged to herds coming from Anchetty to the southwest and from Gulhatti and Aiyur to the east. He even carried off a large donkey from Salivaram which, as I have said, lay to the north of Sivanipalli and well outside of the forest reserve proper.

Just about this time I happened to pay a visit to Sivanipalli accompanied by a friend. We had gone there after lunch on a Sunday, intending to take an evening stroll in the forest and perhaps get a jungle fowl, or a couple of green pigeon for the pot. The story of the advent and activities of the black panther greatly interested me. Only once before had I seen one of its kind outside a zoo, and I was therefore determined to bag this specimen if possible.

I offered to pay the villagers the price of the next animal killed by this panther if they would leave it undisturbed and inform me. They must go by bus to the small town of Hosur Cattle Farm, which was the closest place to a telegraph office, where a message could be sent to me at Bangalore. I also asked them to spread the same information to

all persons living at places where the panther had already struck. Finally, as a further incentive and attraction, I said that I would not only pay for the dead animal, but give a cash *baksheesh* of fifty rupees to him who carried out my instructions carefully.

Anticipating a call within the next few days I kept my portable *charpoy-machan* and other equipment ready at Bangalore to leave within a few minutes of receiving the telegram. But it was over a fortnight before that call eventually came. Moreover it arrived late! That is to say, it reached me just before four o'clock in the evening. I was on my way by four-fifteen, but it was about seven-fifteen and quite dark by the time I reached Sivanipalli.

I noticed that the telegram had been handed in at Hosur Cattle Farm at about one-thirty that afternoon, which was far too late, apart from the additional delay that had taken place at the Bangalore end because it had been classed as an ordinary message, instead of an express telegram, as I had specified.

There was a man named Rangaswamy living at Sivanipalli, who had assisted me as *shikari* on two or three previous occasions, and it was this man who had sent the telegram from Hosur Cattle Farm to say that the panther had made a kill at ten that very morning, shortly after the cattle had left the village for grazing. The herdsman in charge, who like the rest had been told of my offer to pay for the animal that had been killed, with a cash bonus as well, had very wisely not touched the carcase but had run back to Sivanipalli with the news which he had given to Rangaswamy, who in turn had made a great effort to reach Denkanikotta in time to catch the twelve-fifteen bus. This he had just managed to do, reaching the Hosur Cattle Farm telegraph office by one o'clock.

Commending Rangaswamy and the herdsman for their prompt action in sending me the news, I now had to decide between trying to stalk the panther on his kill with the aid of torchlight or waiting at Sivanipalli until the following evening to sit up for him. The former plan was a complete gamble as there was no certainty whatever that the panther would be on the kill, or anywhere near it, when I got there. At the same time I could not find any very convincing excuse to justify spending the next twenty-four hours cooped up in the hamlet doing nothing.

I enquired where the kill had taken place and was informed that it was hardly half a mile to the west of the village, where the land began its steep descent to the bed of the stream about three miles away. It seemed too temptingly close and this decided me to tell Rangaswamy and the herdsman that I would endeavour to bag the panther that very night while he was eating the kill, if they would lead me to a quarter of a mile from the spot and indicate the direction in which the kill lay.

I felt I could trust my own sense of hearing and judgement to guide me from there on.

They were both against this plan and very strongly advocated waiting till the following evening, but I said that I would like to try it anyhow.

By the time all this talk was finished it was ten minutes to eight and there was no time to be lost, as the panther would probably be eating at that very moment. I clamped my three-cell, fixed-focus electric torch which was painted black to render it inconspicuous, to my rifle and dropped three spare cells into my pocket together with five spare rounds of ammunition. Four more rounds I loaded into the rifle, keeping three in the magazine and one in the breech. Although the .405 Winchester is designed to carry four rounds in the magazine and one 'up the spout', I always load one less in the magazine to prevent a jam, which may occur should the under-lever be worked very fast in reloading. Lastly, I changed the boots I had been wearing for a pair of light rubber-soled brown 'khed' shoes. These would to a great extent help me to tread lightly and soundlessly. I was wearing khaki pants and shirt at the time, and I changed into the black shirt I generally wear when sitting up in a *machan*.

Rangaswamy and the herdsman came along with me up to a dry rivulet. Then the latter told me that this rivulet ran almost directly westwards with just two bends in its course to the spot where the panther had killed. He said the dead cow had later been dragged about two hundred yards inside the jungle roughly northwards of the place where the rivulet completed the second bend.

Their instructions were clear enough and I was grateful for the two bends in the stream which enabled them to be so specific. Telling the men to go back, as I would eventually be able to find my own way to Sivanipalli, I started out on my attempt.

I considered the wisest and most silent approach would be along the bed of this dry stream rather than along the top of either of its banks. Any slight sounds I might inadvertently make would then be muffled and less audible to the panther. Secondly, by walking along the bed of the stream I could easily follow its course without having to shine my torch to see where I was going, which I might have to do if I were to walk along the bank where the vegetation would impede me, the more so because it was very dark indeed and the sky very overcast, the clouds completely hiding the stars and whatever pale light they might have cast.

Accordingly I moved forward very carefully and soon felt the stream making its first curve, which was in a southwesterly direction. After a while the stream started to turn northwards again, and then

straightened out to resume its westerly course. I had passed the first of the two bends the herdsman had mentioned.

Not long afterwards it curved into its second bend, but this time in a northerly direction. I moved as carefully as possible to avoid tripping upon any loose stone or boulder that might make a noise. Although from the information I had been given I knew the kill was still about three hundred yards away, panthers have very acute hearing, and if my quarry were anywhere in the immediate vicinity, if not actually eating on the kill, he would hear me and, as like as not, make off again.

Fortunately the rivulet was more or less clear of boulders and bushes along this part of its course and this helped me to edge along silently. A little later it had completed its northward turn and it began to curve southwards. After a few yards it straightened out once more and resumed its main westerly direction.

I halted. I had reached the place at which the panther had killed the cow and from where he had dragged the kill into the jungle for about two hundred yards to the north. I knew that I must now leave the rivulet and strike off into the undergrowth to try and locate the carcass and the killer, whom I hoped to surprise in the act of eating. In the deep gloom I had only my sense of hearing to guide me.

I tiptoed towards the northern bank of the stream which was, at that spot, only breast-high. With my feet still on the sandy bed, I gently laid the rifle on the bank and, folding my arms across my chest, leaned against it, listening intently.

Five minutes passed, but there was no sound of any kind to disturb the silence. Perhaps the kill was too far away to allow me to hear the panther eating; that is, if he was on the kill and if he was eating.

Putting my weight on my hands, I gently drew myself up to the top of the bank, making no sound as I did so. I then picked up the rifle and started to move forward very, very slowly. The darkness was intense. At the same time I knew I had really little, if anything, to fear from the panther should he discover me, as he was not a man-eater and had shown no inclination at any time to molest human beings. Nevertheless, this was my first experience with a black panther and I had heard several of the usual stories about them being exceptionally dangerous and aggressive. That made me quite nervous, I can honestly tell you.

Inching forward, I stopped every few yards to listen for sounds that would indicate that the panther was busy eating. Only they could guide me, as it was hopeless to expect to see anything without the aid of my torch, which could only be used when I was close enough to fire. The slightest flicker of the beam now would drive the panther away should he happen to see the light.

I went along in this fashion, taking what seemed an interminable time. Perhaps I had progressed seventy-five yards or more when, during one of the many stops I made to listen, I thought I heard a faint sound coming from in front and a little to the right. I listened again for some time, but it was not repeated.

Bushes and trees were now growing thickly around me, and my body, in pushing through the undergrowth, was making some noise in spite of the utmost care I was taking to prevent this. So were my feet as I put them down at each tread. I tried pushing them forward by just raising them off the ground and sliding them along, but I was still not altogether silent. I did this not only to try and eliminate noise, but to disguise my human footfalls should the panther hear me. He would certainly not associate any sliding and slithering sounds with a human being, but ascribe them to some small nocturnal creature moving about in the grass and bushes; whereas the sound of an ordinary footfall would immediately convey the fact that there was a man in the vicinity. An uncomfortable thought came into my mind that I might tread on a poisonous snake in the dark, and the rubber shoes I was wearing did not protect my ankles. I dispelled that thought and tried walking around the bushes and shrubs that arose before me. This caused me to deviate to some extent from the northerly course towards the dead cow I had been instructed to follow.

I stopped every now and then to listen, but the sound I had last heard was not repeated. It was some time later that I concluded that I had far exceeded the distance of two hundred yards from the rivulet at which the kill was said to be lying and also that I had hopelessly lost all sense of direction, enveloped as I was amongst the trees and scrub, under an overcast sky.

Then suddenly I heard the sound I had so long been hoping to hear —the unmistakable sound of tearing flesh and crunching bones.

I had been lucky indeed. The panther was on his kill at that moment and, what was more, was actually engrossed in feeding. Now all I had to do was to try to creep sufficiently close to enable me to switch on my torch and take a shot. But that was all very well in theory. The idea was far easier than its execution.

To begin with, the sounds did not come from the direction in which I was moving, but to my left and some distance behind me, indicating that I had not steered a straight course in the darkness. I had veered to the right, bypassing the kill. Perhaps the reason I had not heard the sound of feeding earlier was because the panther had only just returned. Or—and it was a most discomforting thought that came into my mind—maybe he had heard me in the darkness as I passed and deliberately stayed quiet.

I paused for a few moments and listened so as to make quite sure

of the direction from which the sounds were coming. In the darkness I guessed the panther to be anything from fifty to a hundred yards away.

I now started to slide my feet forward very slowly and very cautiously towards the noise.

If the panther had dragged his kill into or behind a bush it would be impossible for me to get the shot I hoped for. On the other hand, all the advantages would be with the panther were I to fire and wound him, and if he attacked—the proposition was altogether a most unpleasant one.

At the same time, I tried to encourage myself by remembering that never before had this panther molested a human being, and that the light from my torch, when eventually I flashed it would fill him with fear and keep him from attacking me, if it did not drive the animal off entirely.

It is difficult to describe truthfully the minutes that ensued, or to recount what I actually did. My mind and senses were so alert and intense, that I negotiated all obstacles in the way of trees and undergrowth automatically. I knew that as long as I could hear the sounds made by the panther as he feasted I could be certain that he was fully engaged on the task at hand and was unaware of my approach. It was only when these sounds ceased that I would have to look out, for then the panther had heard me and had stopped his feeding to listen.

The sounds continued and so did I, creeping forward cautiously, never putting my foot down till I had tested each step with my toe. When I heard or sensed a leaf rustle beneath me, I groped for a place where I could tread more silently. All the while I kept my eyes strained upon the darkness before me and my ears pricked for the sounds of feeding.

Then suddenly those sounds stopped, and an absolute, awful silence engulfed me.

Had the panther stopped eating for a while of his own accord? Had he finished and gone away? Was he just going away? Or had he heard my stealthy approach and was even at that moment preparing to attack? The alternatives raced through my mind and I came to a halt too.

I remained thus, silent and stationary, for some time. Just how long I have no idea, but I remember that I was thinking what I should do next. To move forward, now that he had stopped eating, would certainly betray my approach to the panther—that is, if he was not already aware of my presence. However careful I might be, it would be impossible for a human being to move silently enough in the darkness to be inaudible to the acute hearing of such an animal. On

the other hand, if I stayed put and kept quiet, there was a chance that I might hear the panther, should he approach, although panthers are well known to move noiselessly.

Of the two courses of action, I decided on the latter, so just stood still. As events were shortly to prove, it was lucky that I did so.

For a few moments later a very faint rustling came to my straining ears. It stopped and then began again. Something was moving. It could have been anything. It was a continuous sort of noise, such as a snake would make as it slithered through the grass and undergrowth. But a panther could just as easily cause it by creeping towards me on his belly. I can assure you that it was a very frightening thought.

One thing was certain. The sound did not come from a rat or a frog, or some small jungle creature or night-bird. Had such been the case, the faint noise would have been in fits and starts; in jerks, as it were, each time the creature moved. But this was a continuous sort of noise, a steady slithering or creeping forward, indicating slow but continuous progress. It was now certain beyond all doubt that the sound was being made by one of the two things: a snake or the panther.

I have taken some time in trying to describe to you my innermost thoughts as they raced through my mind. In fact, they raced through so fast that I had made up my mind within a few seconds of hearing that ominous, stealthy, creeping approach.

Another few seconds longer and I had decided that the panther was certainly creeping towards me, but as long as I could hear him I knew I was safe from any attack. Then abruptly the noise ceased.

Next came the well-known hissing sound comparable to that made by an angry cobra when it exhales the air from its body in a sudden puff. The panther was beginning to snarl. Very shortly he would snarl audibly, probably growl, and then would come the charge. I had heard the same sequence of noises often enough before and knew what to expect. Quickly raising the rifle to my shoulder, I pressed the switch of the torch.

Two baleful reddish-white eyes stared back at me, but I could make out nothing of the animal itself till I remembered I was dealing with a black panther, which would be practically invisible at night.

Perhaps it had at first no vicious intentions in approaching me, but had just sneaked forward to investigate what it had heard moving about in the vicinity of its kill. But having identified the source as a hated human being, that hissing start to the snarl showed that the black panther had definitely decided to be aggressive. His eyes stared back at the light of my torch without wavering.

I had plenty of time in which to take careful aim. Then I fired.

Instead of collapsing as I hoped and expected, or at least biting

and struggling in its death-throes, the panther sprang away with a series of guttural roars. Had I missed entirely, or had I wounded the beast?

I felt certain that I could not have missed, but that was a question that could only be settled by daylight. I turned to retrace my steps.

This time, of course, I was free to use my torch, and with its aid I walked back roughly in the direction I had come.

I had thought wrong, however, and floundered about for half an hour without being able to regain the rivulet up which I had approached.

I looked at the sky. It was still cloudy and I could not pick out a single star that would help set me, even roughly, in the right direction to Sivanipalli village. Then I remembered that the land sloped gently westwards from the hamlet towards the ravine formed by the two rivers to the west. Therefore, if I walked in a direction that led slightly uphill I could not go wrong and would surely come out somewhere near the village.

I started walking uphill.

But I did not reach Sivanipalli or anywhere near it. To cut a long story short, it was past eleven-thirty that night when I landed, not at Sivanipalli or its precincts as I had expected, but more than halfway up the track leading northwards to Salivaram. After that, of course, I knew where I was and within half-an-hour had reached the village.

There I awoke Rangaswamy and related what had happened. There was nothing more to do then than bed down for the night.

I have told you already that Sivanipalli was a small place boasting scarcely half-a-dozen huts. Rangaswamy himself was a much-married man with a large household of women and children and I could not expect him to invite me into his hut. So I lay down in a hayrick that stood a little off the main *path* and pulled the straw, already damp with dew, over me to try and keep warm.

If you should ever wish to undergo the lively experience of being half-eaten alive by the tiny grass ticks that abound in and round forest areas in southern India, I would recommend you to spend a night in a hayrick at Sivanipalli. You will assuredly not be disappointed. The grass tick is a minute creature which is normally no larger than the head of a pin. After it has gorged itself on your blood it becomes considerably larger. But it is a most ungrateful feeder. Not only does it suck your blood, but it leaves a tiny wound which rapidly develops into a suppurating sore. This increases in size in direct proportion to the amount of scratching you do to appease the intolerable itch and eventually turns into quite a nasty sore with a brown crust-like scab, and a watery interior. Moreover, should many of these creatures favour you with their attention at the same time, you will surely get a

fever in addition to the sores.

I hardly slept at all during the rest of that confounded night, but spent the remaining hours of darkness scratching myself all over. Dawn found me a very tired, a very disgruntled and a very sore individual, who had most certainly had the worst of that night's encounter with the enemy—in this case the almost microscopical little grass tick.

The first thing to do, obviously, was to make some hot tea to raise my morale, which was at a decidedly low ebb, and with this in view I went to Rangaswamy's hut, only to find the door closed fast. It was evident that the inmates intended making a late morning. This did not fit in with my plans at all, so I pounded on the solid wooden structure and called aloud repeatedly. After quite a time I heard sounds of movement from within. Eventually the wooden bar that fastened the door on the inside was withdrawn, and a very tousled-headed, sleepy Rangaswamy emerged.

I instructed him to light a fire, which he started to do on the opposite side of the village road by placing three stones on the ground at the three points of a triangle, and in the middle making a smoky fire with damp sticks and straw. I had not brought any receptacle with me for boiling water, so I had to borrow one of his household earthenware pots, which he assured me was absolutely clean, a statement which I myself was not quite prepared to believe from its appearance.

However, the water eventually boiled. I had put some tea leaves into my water bottle, after emptying it of its contents, poured in the boiling water, re-corked it and shook it in lieu of stirring. In the meantime the inmates of the other huts had come to life. They watched me interestedly. Some offered little milk, and someone else contributed some jaggery, or brown sugar, for which I was very grateful, having also forgotten to bring sugar. We boiled the milk and put some lumps of jaggery into my mug, adding tea and boiling milk. Believe it or not, it brewed a mixture that did have some resemblance to tea.

Breakfast consisted of some eggs which I purchased and hard-boiled over the same fire. By about seven I had restored enough interest in myself and events, after my dreadful encounter of the previous night with those obnoxious little ticks, to think of doing something about the panther.

I asked Rangaswamy to get the herdsman who had accompanied us the previous night and who had not put it an appearance so far that morning, or one of his companions, to collect a herd of buffaloes if they were obtainable and drive them into the thick undergrowth to dislodge the panther, as I felt confident that I had not missed the brute

entirely with my one shot.

All present answered that there were no buffaloes in Sivanipalli; and no one was willing to risk his cattle being injured in a possible encounter with the panther. Just then my missing companion of the night before—the herdsman who had accompanied me—turned up. He said that he had a friend at Salivaram who owned a muzzle-loading gun. He had wanted to borrow the gun so as to come along and assist me, and with that in view he had set out to Salivaram early that morning while it was yet dark. Unfortunately, his friend was away with his gun and so he had been unable to borrow it. He had returned empty-handed.

I thanked him for his thoughtful intention to assist me, but inwardly I was more than thankful that he had been unsuccessful in borrowing the muzzle-loader. With an inexperienced user, a muzzle-loader can become mighty deadly weapon and I confess I would have felt most nervous with him and that gun behind me.

Having failed to obtain the use of buffaloes, I then tried to enlist the cooperation of the owners of such village curs as there were at Sivanipalli. After some humming and hawing, one solitary cur was produced. She was a lanky bitch, with ears cut off at their base, entirely brown in colour, with a tremendously long curved tail. The typical example of village 'pariah dog', as they are called, whose ears had been amputated when a puppy because of the ticks which would in later life have become lodged on and inside them. With villagers, it is a simple process of reasoning to come to the conclusion that it takes less effort, and far less time, to cut off the ears of their dogs when they are puppies than periodically to remove scores of ticks in later life.

By a strange coincidence, this bitch was named 'Kush', which reminded me of the name of the dog 'Kush Kush Kariya' owned by my old friend of jungle days,* Byra the poojaree. I don't know if this name is a favourite among the dog owners of the forest areas of Salem district, or whether it just lends itself to a natural sound emitted to attract the attention of any dog. Personally I am inclined to the latter idea. Whatever it may be, I did not know then that this bitch Kush would conduct herself every bit as precociously as her namesake, the animal owned by Byra.

Finally, accompanied by Rangaswamy, the herdsman, Kush and her owner, we set off to try and find out what had become of the panther.

We retraced our steps of the night before to the spot where my companions had left me, then followed in my own footsteps along the two bends in the rivulet and finally climbed its northern bank at the place I had chosen the previous night.

Thereafter I led the way with cocked rifle, Kush running between

me and her owner, who came last in file. Between us came Rangaswamy, with the herdsman behind him.

As I had already discovered the night before, the undergrowth was dense, so that there was no means of tracing the exact course I had followed only twelve hours previously; nor, being daylight, was I able to pick out any of the trees or bushes I had negotiated in the darkness, although I knew roughly the direction in which I had gone.

The herdsman, of course, knew where the kill lay, but I did not want to go directly to it, my idea being to find, if possible, the place where I had fired at the panther. I did not succeed. Those who have been in jungles will understand how very different in size, shape and location just a small bush appears in daylight compared with its appearance at night. Darkness greatly magnifies the size of objects in the forest, distorts their shape and misleads as regards direction.

To help me find what I was looking for, I got the herdsman to lead us to the dead cow, which he found without difficulty. Incidentally, it had been half-eaten, although of course there was no means of knowing just then whether the panther had fed before my encounter with it, or whether I had entirely missed him and he had returned to feed after I had left. Panthers sometimes return to their kill if they are missed, although such behaviour, in my experience at least, is not very common.

Having reached the kill, I now tried to recollect and recast the direction from which I had come, so as to try and follow my own footsteps from there and eventually come to the spot where I had fired. Unfortunately I had no means of knowing exactly how far the panther had crept towards me, but had to rely entirely on my own judgement as to how far away he had been when I first heard him feeding. Sounds in jungle at night, when both the hearer and the origin of the sound are enveloped by the surrounding undergrowth, can be very deceptive, and the distance they may travel is hard to guess for that very reason. I felt that to the best of my knowledge, I could have been standing anything from fifteen to fifty yards from the dead cow.

Deciding approximately on the distance where I might have been standing, I paced off those fifteen yards and got one of the men to mark the spot by bending down a small branch. Then I paced another thirty-five yards to attain the maximum distance of fifty yards, which I judged would be about the greatest that could have separated me from the feeding panther I had heard the night before. Here we bent another branch.

Somewhere in between these two markers, and very approximately in the same direction as I was walking, I knew I should find some sign of whether my bullet had struck the panther. If I did not find anything

then I would have to conclude that I had completely missed him.

By this time I was also sure that the panther, if he had been wounded, was not lurking anywhere in the immediate vicinity, for had that been the case he would undoubtedly have given some sign by now, hearing us walking about and talking. That sign would have been in the form of a growl, or perhaps even a sudden charge. The absence of any such reaction and the complete silence led me to conclude that even if I had hit him, the wound was not severe enough to prevent him from getting away from the spot.

I instructed my three companions to cast round in a circle, and search carefully for a possible blood-trail. I joined them, and it was not very long before Kush, sniffing at something, attracted her owner's attention. He called out that he had found what we were looking for. Gathering around him and the bitch we saw an elongated smear of dried blood on a blade of lemon grass.

My spirits rose considerably. Here was proof that I had not missed. The height of the blood mark from the ground indicated that I had wounded my quarry somewhere in the upper part of his body, and as I knew I had fired between his eyes as they had reflected my torchlight, my bullet must have grazed his head. Alternatively, if he had happened to be crouching down with raised hindquarters at that time (a rather unlikely position for a panther to adopt when creeping forward), my bullet might be embedded itself somewhere in the rear part of his back.

This was where Kush showed her merit. She was a totally untrained cur, but she instinctively appeared to sense what was required of her. For a little while she sniffed around wildly and at random, then started to whine and run ahead of us.

We followed and found more bloodsmears on leaves and blades of grass where the panther had passed. Between the bushes and clumps of high grass there were spots of blood on the ground too. This was an encouraging find, as it showed that the animal had been bleeding freely, clear evidence that the wound was not just a superficial graze.

The blood itself had mostly dried, except in some very sheltered places. There it was moist enough to be rubbed off by the fingers. However, it was neither thick nor dark enough to suggest that my bullet had penetrated a vital organ, such as a lung.

Kush set out very rapidly in a westerly direction, and it was quite obvious she was following a trail that would eventually bring us to the sharp decline in the land, down to the bed of the stream flowing from north to south before it joined the other stream lower down and turned westwards. This stream, before its confluence, is known as the Anekal Vanka. The combined streams are called Dodda Halla, which in the Kanarese language literally means the 'Big Gorge'. It has this

name because so many sections flow through ravines and gorges as they twist and twine a torturous path past the village of Anchetty. There the river changes its course abruptly and turns southwards, past Gundalam, to its eventual junction with the Cauvery river. It is this same stream, the Dodda Halla, that was once the haunt of the man-eating tiger of Jowlagiri,* but that is another story. I have explored every section of it, right up to the place where it joins the Cauvery, and have nicknamed it the 'Secret river', partly because of the fact that due to the many miles of rough walking entailed in following its course, few people come that way, and it is delightfully lonely and far away from the sight and sound of human beings; also because I have discovered secrets of geological interest along its banks. I hesitate to divulge them, for with their publicity must automatically follow the next necessary evil, the violation of the sanctity of one of the most delightfully isolated jungle localities in Salem district.

Returning to events as they occurred that morning. The undergrowth was very dense, but to the unerring instinct of Kush this appeared to offer no obstacle. In fact, the trouble lay in keeping up with her. Her small and lithe brown body dodged in and out between bushes and outcrops of 'wait-a-bit' thorn. Our legs, hands and arms were severely lacerated by these thorns because we were moving at a foolish speed in order to keep the bitch in sight, taking no precautions whatever against a sudden attack by the wounded panther if he happened to lie immediately ahead of us. At times the brambles and other obstructions slowed us down, and Kush would get far ahead and disappear. It then became necessary to whistle her back, and when she did so, which was only after some minutes, she appeared to experience some difficulty in picking up the trail again.

We had no rope with us, so I borrowed the herdsman's turban and knotted one end of the cloth around Kush's neck, giving the other end to her owner. But it was a small turban and the cloth too short. The man had to stoop down to retain his hold, while Kush strained, spluttered and coughed in her anxiety to forge ahead.

In this fashion we progressed until we eventually reached the edge of the plateau where the land began to fall away sharply to the bed of the Anekal Vanka stream, which we could see between breaks in the tree-tops below us, the sun glinting on the silvery surface of the water as it meandered from side to side on its sandy bed. The stream itself was three-fourths dry at that time of the year.

A little later we came across the first concrete evidence that the panther had begun to feel the effects of his wounds. He had lain down in the grass at the foot of a *babul* tree and had even rolled with pain, as blood was to be seen in patches and smears where he had rested and tossed. Kush spent a long time at this spot and evinced another

unusual characteristic by licking at the blood. Ordinarily a village cur is terrified of a panther, but Kush, as I have said already, was an unusual animal, and it was indeed very lucky that her owner had been willing to bring her along. Normally, villagers who will not hesitate to lop off the ears of a puppy at their base will vote that it is a cruel practice to employ a dog for tracking down a wounded panther or tiger and will flatly refuse to be parties to such a deed. As it was, without the invaluable aid rendered by this bitch, we would never have been able to follow the blood trail as we did that morning. It would not have been visible to normal human eyesight in the heavy underbrush.

As we descended the deep decline, vegetation became sparser and the ground became bare and rocky. Boulders were scattered everywhere, interspersed with tufts of the tough long-bladed lemon-grass.

Then we reached a stage where there were only boulders, big and small, and the descent had almost ended. This was the high-level mark reached by the waters of the stream when in spate during the monsoon.

Here, with the end of the vegetation, tracking became easy. Drops of tell-tale rusty brown, where blood had fallen from the wounded animal and splashed on the rocks, revealed its passage. Judging from the distance we had come and the quantity of blood that the panther had lost, it appeared to be more severely hurt than I had at first imagined. The wound must have been a deep one and the bullet had probably struck an artery. Had it been elsewhere, particularly in some fleshy part of the animal, there was a possibility that the bleeding might have lessened, if not ceased entirely, by the natural fat under the skin coming together and closing the hole made by the bullet.

We reached the narrow bed of the stream in which the water was still flowing. Here the panther had crouched down to drink, and there were two sets of blood marks, one nearer to the water's edge than the other. The marks further away indicated more bleeding than those closer. This was curious and it puzzled me greatly at the time, considering I had fired only one shot the night before. The solution was an even greater surprise.

At one spot the panther had stepped into his own gore and had left a clear pug-mark on a rock just before he had waded across the stream. The mark had been made by the animal's one of the forefeet and its size suggested a panther of only average proportions that was probably male. The blood had been washed off the foot by the time the animal had reached the opposite bank, but the dried drops on the stones and boulders continued.

After crossing the stream the panther had changed his course and

had walked parallel with the edge of the water and alongside it for nearly two hundred yards, then he had turned to the left and begun to climb the opposite incline. The stones and rocks once more gave way rapidly to vegetation, and again we negotiated thickets of long grass, thorny clumps, small scattered bamboos and trees.

Up and up the panther had climbed, and now so did Kush on the trail, conducting herself as if she had been specially trained for the job. Eventually we came to the road which leads from Denkanikotta to Anchetty and which intersects the forest on its way downwards to the latter village. We had come out on this road exactly opposite the ninth milestone, which we now saw confronting us at the roadside. Incidentally this was the road on which I had parked my car near the fifth milestone when I had left it the evening before to walk to Sivanipalli.

Many carts had traversed the road during the night and in the earlier hours of that morning, and the scent was completely lost for a moment in the powdery brown dust. But Kush had no difficulty in picking it up on the other side, and we followed behind her.

The grass and bamboos gradually gave way to more thorns and more lantana, which tore at our clothing and every part of our anatomy they touched. In places, where the panther had crept beneath the lantana and thorn bushes, an almost impenetrable barrier confronted us. There was no way through and there was no way around, leaving no alternative but to follow by creeping on our bellies beneath the bushes.

My rifle was an encumbrance in such places and conditions, and I cursed and swore as the thorns tore at my hair and face and became embedded in my hands, body and legs. The plight of my three companions was infinitely worse, as they wore thinner and less clothing than I did. Perhaps their skins were thicker—I really don't know. But I am sure that the language that floated from all four of us would have won us prizes in any Billingsgate contest. Only Kush was unperturbed, and from her position ahead she kept looking back at us, clearly impatient at the slow, clumsy progress we were making.

But this time it was also evident that the wounded animal was heading for a large hill that lay about half a mile behind a hamlet named Kundukottai. This village was situated between the seventh and eighth milestones on the Denkanikotta-Anchetty road which we had just crossed. The top of the hill was known to hold many caves, both large and small, and what was worse, the arched roofs of some of the larger caves had been chosen by the big jungle rock-bees as safe and ideal places in which to construct their hives. I had often seen these hives as I had motored along the road to Anchetty on previous occasions.

I felt that my chances of bagging the black panther were becoming very dim indeed. Looking for him amongst those caves would be like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack. In addition, the panther had the bees to guard him if his place of retreat happened to be one of the many caves they had chosen for their hives. I can assure you that these rock-bees, when disturbed, can be most formidable opponents.

We plodded along and broke cover below the line of caves where the thorn bushes thinned out and became less numerous owing to shelves of sloping rock, worn glass-smooth by centuries of rainwater as it ran down from above.

The scent led up and across the sloping shelf of rock to one of the larger openings that loomed above us. From where we stood we could see the black masses of at least half-a-dozen beehives hanging from the roof of the cave, each about a yard long by about two feet wide. The remains of old abandoned hives were scattered here and there amongst them, the wax sticking out from the rock in flatfish triangles of a dirty yellow-white colour, perhaps nine inches long.

My canvas-soled shoes enabled me to climb the slippery shelf without much difficulty, while the bare feet of my companions helped them even more. Kush's claws made a faint clicking sound as she scampered up the rock ahead of us.

We reached the entrance to the cave where a subdued rustling sound was all-pervading. It came from the movements of millions of bees as they crawled in and about the hanging hives above us. There was also a continuous faint droning, that arose from the wings of the busy insects as they flew in from the jungle with honey from the wild flowers, which they would store in the hives, and from those departing on a trip for more.

The little creatures were absorbed in their duties and paid no attention to us, but we realized that if we happened to disturb them, these same little creatures, so unoffending and peaceful now, would pour on to us in a venomous attack like a torrent of black lava and sting us to death in a matter of a few minutes.

We stood before the entrance of the cave, where the blood trail, very slight now, was still visible in the form of two tiny dried droplets. They showed that the wounded beast had gone inside.

Near its mouth the cave was comparatively large, some twenty feet across by about twenty feet high. Daylight filtered into the interior for some yards, beyond which all was darkness. I counted nine separate beehives, all of great size, suspended from the roof of the cave close to the entrance. The floor was of rock and appeared to be free of the usual dampness associated with such places. No doubt this accounted for the cave being inhabited by the panther—and the bees, too. For

these animals and insects, particularly the former, dislike damp places.

I whispered to my three companions to remain outside and to climb up the sloping rock by the sides of the entrance to a point above the cave, and on no account to go downhill, as that was the direction in which the panther would charge if he passed me. They disappeared, and Kush and I entered the cave.

From that moment Kush seemed to know there was danger ahead. Gone was her erstwhile courage, and she slunk at my heels, gradually falling behind me.

I walked forward as far as I could see in the dim light that filtered in from outside. At most, this might have been for about thirty feet. Then we came to a halt. I could go no further as, not anticipating that my quarry would enter such a cave, I had not brought my torch with me from the village.

There were now two alternatives either to try to arouse the wounded animal, or to return to Sivanipalli for the torch, telling the men to keep watch from their position of comparative safety above to guard against the panther slinking out before I came back. I should, of course, have followed the second course. Not only was it safer, but more sure. I suppose, really, I felt too lazy to go all that way back and return again. So I thought I would give the first plan a trial and if possible save myself the trouble of a long walk.

I whistled and shouted loudly. Nothing happened. I shouted again. Kush, who had been simpering, then started to bark. Still nothing happened.

The cave had narrowed down to about half its dimensions at the entrace. Only silence rewarded our efforts. The deep, dark interior was as silent as a grave.

Had the wounded animal died inside? This seemed unlikely, as there was no evidence that the panther had lain down again after the first rest he had taken before crossing the Anekal Vanka stream. Had he left the cave before our arrival? This might easily have happened; but again there was no evidence to suggest that such was the case.

I looked around for something to throw. Just one large stone lay close to my feet. I picked it up in my left hand and found it heavy.

I am left-handed, for throwing purposes, although I shoot from the right shoulder. I had already cocked my rifle, and, balancing it in the crook of my right arm, threw the stone under-arm with as much force as I could muster. It disappeared into the blackness of the cave. I heard it strike the rock floor with a dull thud and then clatter on in a series of short bounces.

The next instant there came the all-too-familiar series of coughing roars as the panther catapulted itself at me out of the darkness. Being a black panther, I could not see it till it emerged from the gloom, two

or three yards in front of my rifle. I fired—but the impetus of its charge made the panther seem to slide forward towards me. I fired again. The confines of the cave echoed and re-echoed with the two reports.

Then all hell was let loose. The sound of the bees, which had been registering all this while almost subconsciously on my hearing as a faint humming drone, rose suddenly to a crescendo. The daylight coming in at the entrance to the cave became spotted with a myriad of black, darting specks, which increased in number as the volume of sound rose in intensity. The black objects hurled themselves at me. The air was alive with them.

I had aroused the wrath of the bees. Gone was all thought of the panther as I whipped off my khaki jacket, threw it around my exposed back and face and doubled for the entrance.

The bees fell upon me as an avalanche. They stung my hands. They got through the folds of the jacket and stung my neck, my head, my face. One even got down under the collar of my shirt and stung my back.

The stings were horribly painful.

I slid down the sloping rock up which we had climbed just a short while before. As from far away, I could hear Kush yelping in anguish. As fast as I moved, my winged tormentors moved faster; the air was thick with them as they dive-bombed me mercilessly, I remembered comparing them to Japan's suicide pilots, who sacrificed their lives and their machines by literally throwing themselves upon the enemy. Similarly, each bee that stung me that day automatically sacrificed its life, for the end of every bee's sting is barbed, and in trying to extricate the point after it has stung an enemy the insect tears out its sting, with the venom-sac attached. These remain embedded in the skin of the victim. Thus, in stinging, the bee does irreparable damage to itself, from the effects of which it dies very soon.

I reached the foot of the sloping shelf with the bees still around me. In desperation I crawled under the thickest lantana bush that was available. Always had I cursed this shrub as a dreadful scourge to forest vegetation and a pest to man, encroaching as it always does on both jungles and fields, in addition to being an impediment to silent and comfortable movement along game trails; but at that moment I withdrew my curses and showered blessings on the lantana instead. It saved my life. For bees must attack and sting during flight, another resemblance they bear to the aforementioned dive-bombers. Clever as they are, they have not the sagacity to settle down and then creep forward on their feet to a further attack. The code with them is to dive, sting and die. The closeness of the network of lantana brambles prevented their direct path of flight on to my anatomy. And so I was

delivered from what would have been certain death had the area just there been devoid of the pestiferous lantana I had so often cursed before.

For no matter how fast I had run, the bees would have flown faster and descended in their thousands upon me.

All the nine hives had been thoroughly disturbed by now, and the buzzing of angry bees droned and drummed in the air above me. I lay still and silent under the protecting lantana, smarting from the many stings the creatures had inflicted on me during my flight.

It took over two hours for the droning to subside and for the bees to settle down to work once more. I felt very sleepy and would have dozed were it not that the pain of the stings kept me awake. The hot burning sensation increased as my skin swelled around each wound.

It was three in the afternoon before I could crawl out of the lantana and wend my way downhill to the road; from there I walked to Kundukottai village. There I found my three followers. They had almost completely escaped the attention of the bees at their vantage point above the entrance to the cave. The bees had evidently concentrated their attack on the moving enemies immediately before them—myself and poor Kush, who was also with the three men now. She had been badly stung, and I had no doubt that the panther had also received their close attention.

All of us walked to the car where I had left it the day before. After we had piled in, I set out for Denkanikotta, where there was a Local Fund Hospital and Dispensary. It was quite late in the evening when we roused the doctor. He took us to his surgery in the hospital and with the aid of a pair of tweezers removed the stings embedded in Kush and myself. We had received, respectively, nineteen and forty-one barbs from those little demons in the cave. The doctor applied ammonia to our wounds.

We spent the night in the forest bungalow at Denkanikotta. The beds there are of iron with no mattresses. So I lay in an armchair. The three men slept on the verandah with Kush.

The stings brought on an attack of ague and fever. Kush suffered, too, and I could hear her whimpers. My neck, face and hands were still swollen. One bee had succeeded in registering a sting not far from the corner of my left eye, causing it partially to close.

Dawn made me look a sorry sight with my swollen eye and puffy face as I stood before the one blurred mirror the bungalow boasted.

We waited till past ten and then drove back to the ninth milestone. Retracing our steps—but this time along cattle and game trails where walking was comparatively easy—we came to the place below the rock-shelf where we had stood the day before.

The bees were once again busy at their hives. All was peaceful and

serene.

Leaving the three villagers, I climbed the slope with Kush for the second time and cautiously approached the cave. I knew I was safe from the bees unless I disturbed them again. And I was almost sure my two shots the previous day had killed the panther. Even if they had not, the bees would have completed that work.

I was right. Lying a few paces inside, and curled into a ball, was the black panther, dead and quite stiff. Kush stayed a yard away from it, sniffing and growling. I put my hand over her mouth to quieten her for fear of disturbing those dreadful bees and bringing them down upon us once more.

Walking out of the cave, I beckoned to the men to come up to me. Together we hauled the panther down the slope. The herdsman, who carried a knife, then lopped off a branch to which we tied its feet with lengths of creepervine. All four of us then shouldered the load and carried it to the waiting car, where I slung the dead animal between bonnet and mudguard.

At the Denkanikotta forest bungalow I removed the skin. It was a male panther, of normal size, measuring six feet seven inches in length. The rosettes showed up distinctly under the black hairs that covered them. It was the first—and incidentally the only—black panther I have ever shot.

It was difficult to detect the bee-stings, embedded in the black hair, but I told the men to make a careful count of the barbs they extracted, which I personally checked. There were 273 stings in that animal, confirmed by the number of barbs extracted. There must have been many more that escaped our attention.

I rewarded the men for their services and returned to Bangalore well compensated for the punishment I had received from the bees—for I had a black panther skin, which is something very uncommon—and I had a wonderfully sagacious dog, Kush, whom I purchased from her owner for seven rupees.

There is one thing I nearly forgot to mention. You will remember that I had discovered two separate blood marks at the spot where the panther had stopped to drink in the Anekal Vanka stream. One of them had shown signs of greater bleeding than the other, and because I had fired only one shot I had wondered about it at the time. The reason was now quite clear. My one bullet, aimed between the eyes, had missed its mark, had furrowed past the temple and ear and embedded itself in the animal's groin. The second wound was the one that had bled severely. The first was only superficial. Evidently the body had been slightly twisted and crouched for the spring as I had fired that night, just in time.

Of the two shots fired in the cave, one (the first) had struck the

panther in the chest, and the other, as the panther skidded towards me, had entered the open mouth and passed out at the back of the neck.

* See *Nine Man-eaters and One Rogue* (Allen & Unwin, London).

Five

Snakes and Other Jungle Creatures

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE ANIMALS OF THE INDIAN JUNGLE that is of great interest to people to whom any sort of animal and any forest form sources of secret attraction. Yeoman authors like Dunbar-Brander, Champion, Glasfurd, Best, Corbett and a host of others have blazed the trail and have recorded the habits of these animals as they personally experienced them. Some of them wrote a half-a-century ago, a time when, it must be remembered, the jungles of the Indian peninsula were literally alive with game, particularly carnivora. There writings were always appreciated, but it is only now that the real intrinsic value of their momentous works comes to the fore, and it will be safe to say that as the years roll by and the wild life of India becomes a thing of the past, the records of these great men will be of ever-increasing value, preserving for posterity knowledge that no riches could ever hope to buy.

It is a significant fact that the *shikaris* of India and even the great white hunters of Africa, who started their careers as trophy seekers or, in the latter case, as professionals, have during their lives invariably found an increasing love for the animals of the forests which they once hunted and killed. The great majority of them came to eschew the habit of killing in favour of the worthier but more difficult art of wild animal photography and the study of nature.

In the early years it was considered a rather hazardous undertaking to enter the jungle on a shooting trip. Apart from the

dangers from the animals themselves which were deemed very great, there were the risks in the form of various poisonous snakes, scorpions, spiders and other creatures, and the threats to health in the jungle diseases such as malaria, black-water fever and so on.

For instance, in my father's day a journey to the forest at the foothills of the Nilgiri mountains, or to the jungles that clothed the districts of Shimoga and Kadur in Mysore state, or to the area around the Western Ghats, was considered a very risky undertaking. The mists that shroud these tracts in the early hours of the morning were regarded as a direct cause of bronchitis, pneumonia and particularly malaria. The jungle beasts were said to be most bold and terrifying.

The old writers have, on the contrary, shown us that the wild creatures were far from aggressive in their habits, and that almost without exception they were afraid of the human race. Science has since taught us that no poisonous spiders, lizards or frogs exist in India and only a few varieties of poisonous snake; also that bronchitis and pneumonia can be contracted anywhere, even in the hottest and driest cities of India. Sir Ronald Ross has shown that a particular species of mosquito carries the malaria parasite and not the damp mists and air of the forests. That parasite is found not only in jungles but throughout the length and breadth of the land. The malarial mosquito breeds in stagnant water and dirty drains, and such places abound even in the largest cities. Campaigns and measures by the authorities have done much to mitigate these evils, and medical science has produced rapid and almost certain cures for the complaints themselves, so that they no longer arouse the dread they once did.

As regards the dangers from wild animals and snakes, one's own experience has been and always will be the best teacher. But with a very few exceptions, and those in only particular places, it is safe and true to state that the dangers of a sojourn in the thickest of forests are far less than those run by a pedestrian when crossing any busy city street. The writers of the past have all shown this.

Of course a greenhorn to the game sometimes does something foolish that may involve him in trouble, but that trouble is entirely the outcome of his own inexperience and ignorance. Experience, particularly for him who is not only willing but anxious to learn, is easily acquired.

The tiger is acclaimed the king of the Indian jungles because the lion is not to be found anywhere except in the Gir Forest in the Gujarat peninsula, where it is very strictly protected. The tiger is a magnificent, beautiful and lordly animal, but it is the elephant who is in actual fact the real lord of the Indian forests by virtue of his great bulk, enormous strength and sometimes unpredictable temperament.

As a rule he is certainly a far more dangerous animal than the tiger, and aborigines living in areas where both these animals abound treat the tiger, with the exception of course of a man-eater, with contempt, while they have the greatest respect for the wild elephant. Walk along a jungle trail with any of these aboriginal tribesmen. Even should you be so lucky as to spot a tiger or panther, he will point it out to you with good-natured indifference. But should the sound of the breaking of a branch come to his ears, he will immediately halt in his tracks and say the one word in his vernacular which means 'elephant', judge the direction from which the sound came and endeavour to find a way that avoids passing anywhere near the locality in which the elephant is feeding.

This inherent caution is the outcome of the accumulated jungle experience of his forebears and himself. They and he have come to know the uncertain nature of these mighty beasts, and so they avoid taking any unnecessary risk.

As a matter of fact the wild elephant is in general a harmless creature, subject to moods and subject to sudden excitement, fright and irritation. To this generalisation there are four exceptions.

By strange contrast, and unlike African elephants, the greater the number in an Indian elephant herd the less the danger from its individual members. The four exceptions are: the accredited 'rogue' elephant that has already killed a human being, a '*musth*' elephant in that periodical sexual state peculiar to the male of the species, occasionally a single male feeding apart from the herd, and a female accompanied by a young calf to protect which she will readily give her life. It is to be noticed that in each of these four cases the danger arises from a single animal and not from the herd. African elephants are reported to have the ability, when occasion demands, of acting collectively when they attempt to charge down upon a hunter *en masse*. The Indian elephant does not do this.

But in any of the four instances listed, the individual animal can be very dangerous and a creature of terrible destructiveness. It will pursue a human being inexorably, sometimes for as much as a mile, provided the man can keep going that far, till it can run him down. Then it will tear him literally limb from limb, or squash him to a pulp by stamping upon him and rubbing him into the ground with its feet, or beat him against the trunk of a tree or whatever happens to be handy, or toss him high into the air.

While sitting at a water hole deep in the forest I often amuse myself at the expense of the wild elephants that come there for their daily drink and wash-up, by calling like a tiger or imitating the sawing sound made by a panther. In the former instance, the elephants, if in a herd, usually trumpet shrilly and dash away to the accompaniment of

much crashing of branches and underbrush. It is delightful to watch mothers with young babies practically carry their youngsters before them by supporting them under their bellies with their trunks, as they hurry away from the presence of that supposed tiger lurking somewhere in the bushes beside the water. Should an elephant have come alone, it invariably stands quite still when it hears the call, flaps his ears forwards to catch the sound and endeavours to scent the whereabouts of the enemy by 'feeling' the air with its trunk. Then it will turn around and slip silently into the jungle. An occasional elephant stamps its feet and tosses its head and trunk to and fro in anger, but within a minute, it too will disappear from the scene. I have not encountered a single elephant that stood its ground while I continued making the tiger-call. Obviously, despite their size and strength, they lack the nerve to remain in the presence of that dreaded feline. I have read somewhere that the elephant's eye has the property of magnifying the object it looks upon. Naturally this would make a tiger or a human being appear relatively larger to the elephant than they are in reality. Perhaps this is the real explanation of why elephants are afraid of tigers, panthers and human beings too.

Panther calls produce a somewhat different effect. If in a herd, the male elephants become aggressive and show signs of being prepared to defend the young. But a single elephant invariably makes off, although not nearly in such a hurry a when a 'tiger' calls. One or two have stamped the water of struck it with their trunks and then continued drinking. But it was clear they were decidedly nervous and uncomfortable.

These amusing little experiments of mine clearly indicate that elephants are far from courageous creatures, despite their great bulk and strength. On the contrary, they are decidedly nervous and timid. Perhaps I am safe in saying that, like all 'bullies', they will only take the fullest advantage of a situation in which their enemy shows signs of fearing them. But attack, apart from the four exceptions mentioned, particularly against anything that might retaliate, is not on the bill of behaviour of the average elephant.

Elephants appear to have an instinctive dislike for white objects. For this very reason milestones and furlong stones along roads in elephant-infested areas are painted black, for such objects, if white, would be immediately uprooted and flung away as soon as an elephant caught sight of them. For the same reason it would be unsafe to dress in white and roam in an elephant forest, for it would only invite attack. In years gone by white, solar topees were the vogue on the ground that, besides being sunproof, they kept the head of the wearer cool by reflecting the sun's rays. A gentleman of my acquaintance was once wandering in a jungle wearing such a white

helmet. Why he wore it in the jungle I do not know, for apart from the aversion of elephants it would be very conspicuous and render hopeless any chance of successfully stalking living creatures. Anyhow, he wore it. He and his tracker, a Sholaga, were going along the ridge of a hill when they noticed an elephant about two hundred yards away, feeding on the other side of a clearing and a little higher up the hill. At the same moment the elephant saw them. Normally it would not have seen them at that distance, for elephants have extremely poor sight, and the breeze was blowing towards them, so that it could not have scented them. But that shining white helmet could not be missed against the green and brown background of the jungle. The elephant trumpeted and gave chase. The hunter and the Sholaga turned tail and fled. Fortunately the Sholaga was an experienced tracker, with years of recorded service and prestige in taking '*sahib* log' into the jungle. He did not desert his protégé, but ran along behind him, telling him in which direction to run. The elephant gained on them rapidly. Then the Sholaga overtook the huntsman, snatched off his white hat and threw it to the ground, while urging the *sahib* to keep on running. The elephant reached the hat and lost interest in chasing them further. Needless to say, that nice piece of headgear also lost all semblance of shape by the time the elephant was through with it. He had not been interested in pursuing or harming them, but it had been too much to ask him to tolerate that dreadful white object. He just had to obliterate it.

Fights among male elephants have been known to go on, with but a few pauses for rest, for as long as three days. A fight may be occasioned by rival tuskers for the favours of a bulky lady, although such examples are few. More often it happens when driving a male elephant in *musth* out of the herd when his attentions to the ladies of the herd become too troublesome. Mostly it happens when a young bull, attaining the fitness that comes with the prime of his life, challenges the master bull of the herd for its leadership.

During such struggles, the bulls do great injury to each other by gouging with their tusks at any portion of the foe's anatomy that may offer itself. It goes without saying that during and after these fights the contestants are in the vilest of tempers and woe betide any living thing they may see.

There was an instance of a forester belonging to the Salem District Forestry Department who came upon a pair of bulls engaged in such a struggle in the fastnesses of the Dodda Halla valley of the Salem district. In that case a strange thing happened. The erstwhile contestants forgot their enmity and thundered down upon him together. He was a sorry mess when eventually his departmental colleagues came upon his remains some days later.

I have written about 'rogue' elephants in some of my earlier stories, so I won't add much about them here, beyond saying that they are the nastiest customers one could encounter in a jungle. Once having heard their trumpet-like screams of rage and hate, and seen their huge bodies bearing down upon you through bush and undergrowth, with trunk curled inwards, ears extended and short tail erect, you will remember the experience till your dying day. The degree of punishment they will inflict on a human being if they catch him varies. One rogue in the foothills of the Nilgiris tossed a forest guard high into the air. In falling, he became impaled on the broken end of a bamboo stem and eventually died. The rogue elephant of Segur, shot by the Reverend Bull, was a comparatively small animal, but was noted nevertheless for his sagacity and ferocity. He would literally stalk a human being or ambush him from behind a rock or clump of bamboos. He caught a coolie woman on the Segur road, stamped her flat, rubbed her remains into the ground with his feet and then playfully tore off the silver anklet she was wearing, as well as the string of wooden beads around her neck, both of which he threw some yards away. There was the case of a convalescent forester in the Coimbatore district who was suffering from guinea-worm. After long periods on sick leave, he eventually became so lazy that he would not —or more probably could not—work. He was transferred to the Biligirirangan Mountain Range, which is an area infested with elephants. It also harboured a rogue at that time, which had long been proclaimed as such but had never been shot. One day this man had the misfortune to meet the rogue. It chased him. In running he twisted an ankle while crossing a stream. The rogue caught up with him and tore him apart. It rampaged around his scattered remains for three days after that and would not permit any traffic to pass, before it had the grace to leave and allow his relatives to gather for cremation what remained. There was another rogue near Bailur in the same district which threw a bullock cart with its oxen off the road. It was killed by Mr Van Ingen, the famous taxidermist of Mysore.

It must be remembered that the incidents I have mentioned above were committed by rogue elephants and hence are unusual. The normal elephant, as I have tried to show, is a timid, retiring creature without any signs of boldness or bravery in its make-up.

For sheer, unsung grit, a wounded wild boar is the biggest-hearted animal in the Indian jungle. Within his comparatively small bulk, contrasted against the much larger animals, he packs more courage, more ferocity and determination, and above all more individual dash and stamina and thirst to kill than any animal I know. Wounded elephants, bison, and even tigers and panthers will invariably try to escape at first and only retaliate when cornered. But wound the old

wild boar and just let him know where you are, and down he comes upon you. No lancer at Balaclava ever charged with more gallantry and determination than will 'porky' if you wound him and then reveal your position.

The tiger very closely follows the elephant as the most interesting animal in the jungles of India. I think he is fascinating. Except for the periodic man-eater which takes to killing and eating human-beings and becomes a terror within an area perhaps of some hundreds of square miles, the tiger otherwise well deserves the label of 'gentleman'.

Hunting him might very truly and justifiably be considered the king of all sports. Following him up when wounded is indeed a hazardous undertaking and calls for the best possible junglecraft on the part of the hunter. But to leave a wounded tiger in the jungle without attempting to finish him off is not only cruel, in that the wounded beast continues to suffer, but cowardly too, having regard to the poor folk who live in and near that area. For that very wound may be the point in his life that turns him into a man-eater. Moreover, he is a gallant opponent. He tries at first to avoid a conflict, but if followed and pressed too hard invariably turns and fights to the last.

A well-known military person of Bangalore, the Rev. Mr. Jervis, once followed a wounded tiger in Kumsi in the Shimoga district. It attacked him and practically chewed through his arm. His Indian car driver, who was also acting as his gun-bearer, but unfortunately knew nothing about using firearms, most pluckily drove the beast off his master while it was mauling him, by attacking it with the butt-end of the spare shotgun he was carrying. Very richly did he deserve, the reward he was given by the congregation of the church for this heroic act. The unfortunate padre was carried to the Kumsi travellers' bungalow, where the local doctor, with the best means available to him at that time, amputated the minister's arm, which was torn to shreds. The arm was later buried in the compound of the bungalow beneath a tree. A special carriage was attached to the next train running to Bangalore and the Rev. Mr. Jervis was sent back, though he died in the Bowring Hospital in Bangalore the next day and was duly buried with full military honours.

The panther does not approach the tiger in size, strength or grandeur. He can also be a very mean foe. I have said before that even man-eating panthers, despite their proclivity for human flesh, generally share the fear of the human species that is distinctive of the rest of their kind. They will rarely attack from the front, but will almost without exception creep upon their prey unawares from behind, as a rule favouring the hours of darkness for such an attack.

The average panther has a propensity for dog flesh which he

appears to regard as a delicacy. There were a couple of panthers living on a small hillock crowned by a temple, hardly a mile out of Kollegal town in Coimbatore district. They made themselves a perfect nuisance to the American missionaries who lived not far from the foot of that hill, by eating up their dogs just as fast as the worthy missionaries could replace them. Eventually the panthers became so obnoxious that the local Sub-Inspector of Police, accompanied by some youths of the town, volunteered to get rid of them by smoking them out of the cave in which they lived. As a preliminary step, the grass in the area was fired. When that failed to expel the miscreants, lighted torches were thrown into the cave. This had the effect of bringing them out at the double, and in the fracas that ensued one panther was killed and some boys were hurt. The other got away after mauling one of the older members of the party. A missionary by the name of Buchanan went after it but was mauled, while the panther escaped.

'Bruin', the sloth bear of the south Indian jungles, is a short-sighted, bad-tempered animal; not brave by any means, but extremely excitable. He is generally a coward. Very recently a family party of three sloth bears—father, mother and rather a big junior—walked into a cave near Closepet in which a panther had already taken up his abode. The panther attacked the three bears. Junior fled on the spot. The two older bears tried to resist, but their courage turned to water before the razor-sharp claws of the infuriated panther, and they also fled. Not only that, but the he-bear was in such a hurry to get away that he did not look where he was going and rolled down a rock about a hundred feet high and broke both his forelegs. The villagers speared him to death the next morning.

Should he see or hear you coming the sloth bear will dash off at speed. If you meet him suddenly at a corner, he will attack without provocation—not impelled by bravery but by fright and a desire to get away from your presence. Possibly he thinks you may try to prevent him doing so, and to make sure that you do not he sets about mauling you. And he will do that very thoroughly, his objective being the eyes and face of the offending being, which he will invariably tear with his blunt four-inch talons. And he will make a better job of it by biting too. I have seen jungle-folk who had been attacked by bears: the wounds inflicted have been really ghastly, leaving the victims with disfigured faces for the rest of their lives.

Bruin often behaves like a clown when digging for roots or burrowing into the nests of white ants. The sounds he emits can resemble anything from a bagpipe being inflated to the droning of an aeroplane, from the buzzing of an angry wasp to the huffing of a blacksmith's bellows, the latter being a sort of background accompaniment to the buzzing and humming sounds. He will twist

and contort his body into all shapes provided he can get at those tasty roots or at those most delectable and delicious termites. He is a heavy sleeper, often sleeping in the shallow holes he has dug in the ground, or between rocks, or in caves, or under shady trees and in grassy areas. He snores so audibly as to be clearly heard at a distance. When he is not snoring, an unsuspecting man may almost tread upon him before he awakens. That sudden awakening will almost certainly cause the startled bear to attack without a second thought.

The Sholagas of Coimbatore are very plucky in dealing with bears. They have been known to split open the skulls of many of these animals with their short, sharp axes. The bear rises upon its hind legs to reach for the face of its victim, thereby exposing its own head, face, throat and chest, and rendering it vulnerable to the sweeping stroke of an axe wielded by a powerful and determined man. The short, black woollen blanket, which a Sholaga generally carries wrapped around his left arm, serves as the only shield.

Although a vegetarian or insect-eater by nature, 'Bruin' is not averse to carrion. I have caught him several times robbing rotten meat from a tiger's or panther's kill.

One of the potential dangers of any jungle are the many varieties of reputedly poisonous snakes that are said to infest the forests. Actually the great majority of snake stories told to the visitor are grossly exaggerated. As a rule, snakes of all varieties are comparatively few in jungle districts and are not often encountered. They exist in much larger numbers in fields and near villages, the reason being that in such places grain is grown. Millions of field-rats live in holes in the ground to eat the grain. And the snakes eat the rats.

Furthermore, as far as humans are concerned, in the whole peninsula there are only five varieties of poisonous snakes capable of inflicting a lethal dose of venom. There are other species of poisonous snakes, too, but their bites would only cause a local swelling and some pain. The deadly varieties are the king cobra or hamadryad, the cobra, the Russell's viper, the saw-scaled viper or 'pursa', and the krait. The coral snake has a very poisonous bite, but its mouth is so tiny as to prevent it from getting a grip anywhere on a human being; apart from which, it has a very docile nature. The pit vipers are all poisonous, but a bite from them is never fatal except in very rare cases where the person bitten suffers from a weak heart and dies more from shock than the effects of poison. Most of the sea snakes are extremely deadly, some of them having venom as much as twelve times the strength of the cobra's; but of course they are only to be found in the sea.

Roughly speaking, the strengths of snake venoms and their

consequent fatality, is as follows: a Russell's viper's poison is about twice as lethal as that of the saw-scaled viper; the cobra's poison three times as strong as that of the Russell's viper; and the krait almost twice as poisonous as the cobra. The king cobra's venom is not quite as strong as that of the ordinary cobra, bulk for bulk, but being a big snake, measuring sometimes fifteen feet and more in length, it makes up in quantity for this slight deficiency of strength, injecting about four times as much as is held in the glands of a cobra, so that a bite from this snake, which is incidentally about the largest poisonous snake in the world, causes death about three times as fast as an ordinary cobra's bite would do.

The hamadryad is found only in hilly regions in the midst of the evergreen forests where the rainfall is very heavy. It lives entirely in jungles and avoids human habitation as far as possible. Its food consists of other snakes, which makes it very difficult to keep in captivity. A specimen died in the Mysore Zoo recently after a full year of starvation, during which every effort was made to provide it with food in the form of various snakes of the nonpoisonous varieties, all of which it steadfastly refused to eat till eventually it died of starvation. Its death caused quite a controversy in the Press of Mysore, where some of the people of the city, on religious grounds, ventilated their strong disapproval of this cruel act on the part of the authorities at the zoo.

The hamadryad, as I have said, is a huge snake, generally of an olive-green colour, banded with white. In Burma and the Malayan region the male is said to be almost jet black, although the white bands still persist. The hood is not so well developed in proportion to the length of the snake as in the common cobra, and does not bear the well-known 'vee' mark. It is said to be very aggressive, attacking on sight, particularly the female of the species while guarding her eggs, which she lays in a nest prepared from fallen, mouldering leaves. However, this aggressiveness I have not experienced myself, although I twice met a hamadryad at very close quarters. The first time I was digging out tree ferns for my garden in Bangalore, while at the same time attempting to catch some rare fish with flaming-red tails that were swimming in a stream deep down in a valley of the Western Ghats, near a place called Agumbe. The fish, by the way, were for my aquarium at home. I saw what looked like the head of an iguana lizard peering at me from a thicket of ferns. I was wading in the bed of the stream at that moment and approached to have a closer look, when the hamadryad—and not an iguana as I had thought—reared up and towered quite six feet above me from its elevated position on the bank. The reptile was trembling with rage, and its black eyes glittered as it exhaled the air noisily from its body. I was not carrying even a

stick, so I stood perfectly motionless. After some moments the trembling subsided, the inflated hood went down, the snake lowered itself and slithered across the stream not five feet away. Halfway across it halted, and regarded me again to see what I was going to do. I did nothing and I still did not move. Then it resumed its course and disappeared amongst the ferns on the other bank.

On the second occasion I was sitting behind a tree on a forest fire-line near Santaveri, on the Baba Budan hills, while a tiger-beat was in progress. Suddenly I heard a peculiar whistling sound from the jungle behind my back. It somewhat resembled the alarm signal made by a bull-bison, and accordingly I expected the bison to show up, when a hamadryad broke cover and crossed the fire-line quite close to me. In that case, however, I doubt if the snake even saw me as I did not move a muscle.

Most people to whom I have related these two incidents say that I saved my own life by not moving, and that had I done so the snakes would have attacked at once. Having never been attacked before by one of these big reptiles I cannot offer any opinion. However, there is no doubt that I was more lucky than the unfortunate German zoologist who came to Agumbe some years ago to catch a pair of hamadryads for a zoo. He caught the male first without trouble. A couple of days later he attempted to catch the female. She bit him. He died there in the jungle itself. In that instance the old proverb that 'the female of the species is more dangerous than the male' proved itself to be literally true. Against this I remember witnessing many years ago at Maymyo, in Burma, the performance put up by a wayside snake charmer. Incidentally she was a Burmese lady, and a very beautiful one at that, as I can still recollect. She took a hamadryad out of a basket and danced before it till it had extended itself some feet above the ground with hood inflated. Then she deliberately kissed it on the mouth. I examined the snake later. It had its poison glands and its fangs. But the hamadryad was a male I remember, and as I have said, she was a very lovely Burmese lady. Perhaps that was why she met with more chivalrous treatment than that unfortunate German scientist.

The ordinary Indian cobra is too well-known to require much description. Contrary to the stories told, it rarely exceeds six feet in length. There are two varieties in India, the first with the widely-publicised spectacle 'vee' mark, which is called the 'biocellate' variety, and the other with only a single white spot on its hood, ringed with black. This is known as the 'monocellate' variety. Here and there specimens are met with that have no mark at all, although their hoods are just as well developed.

Colouring is a very unreliable means of identifying cobras, as they

are to be found in all varieties and shades from jet black to various kinds of brown and even reddish, whitish or greenish hues. Grey and brown are the most common colours. Even young cobras, when they are hatched and are just six inches long, are deadly venomous. They are also far more aggressive during the first two years of their lives. They mellow in temperament as they grow older, and very old specimens are not given to biting without extreme provocation. At this age they can be completely tamed while in full possession of their fangs and poison sacs.

Cobras lay quite soft-shelled eggs, about fifteen in number, each about the size of a pigeon's egg, in a shallow hole or among decaying leaves. To hatch these eggs successfully requires indirect heat from the sun together with considerable humidity. Without humidity they shrivel up.

The krait averages about three feet in length and is a slender black snake with white rings around its body. It is very swift in movement, but at the same time is very shy and nervous and generally dies in captivity within a day or two of being caught, for no apparent reason.

The king cobra, the cobra and the krait are known as 'colubrine' snakes, and their venom causes a collapse of the entire nerous system as a primary symptom. Each has two fixed fangs, the length of the normal cobra's being about a quarter of an inch, the hamadryad's about half an inch, and the krait's about one-eighth of an inch.

The 'viperine' snakes are the Russell's viper and the saw-scaled viper. They also have two fangs, one on each side. These lie flat against the back of the mouth when not in use, but can be erected and rotated about their base as an axis. The fangs of a big Russell's viper grow to a full inch and can pierce through a soft-leather boot, *putties*, pants or thick woollen stockings. A cobra's or krait's fangs, being 'fixed' and not rotatable, cannot do this. The Russell's viper itself is a stout snake growing to a little over five feet in length and possessing three rows of diamond-shaped markings running down its back (one to the centre and one on each side), joined together in chain-like fashion and of a rich dark brown. For this reason it is sometimes called the 'chain-viper'.

The saw-scaled viper hardly exceeds two feet in length and is a brown snake with white 'notch' markings across its back. Its distinctive feature is that it possesses rough keeled-back scales. When annoyed, it coils round and round against itself, the scales producing quite a loud rasping sound in the process. This gives it its Indian name of 'pursa', 'poorsa' or 'phoorsa', which is a phonetic rendering of the sound made by the rasping scales.

The 'colubrine' snakes have grooves down the backs of their fangs along which the venom trickles when ejected from the poison-sacs.

The 'viperine' snakes have channels down the centre of the fang itself, like the needle of a hypodermic syringe, for the passage of the poison. Naturally, because of this, the wearing of thick socks, *putties*, long trousers and soft boots is practically no obstruction to the bite of a viperine snake, although they may do so to that of a colubrine, for, being exposed, most of the venom will be absorbed by the material itself or dispersed against the leather of a boot. The longer, rotatable, hypodermic-like fangs of the two deadly vipers ensure that the unfortunate victim receives a lethal dose more or less intact, just as it is expelled from the venom glands. This is particularly so in the case of a Russell's viper, the tremendously long fangs of which will penetrate any normal material.

The chief effect of viperine venom is to cause haemorrhage, which gives the victim a good deal of pain.

Of course, it is impossible to name more than average periods of time for a bite by any one of these reptiles to prove fatal to a human being. The other factors involved are the age, health, constitution and physique of the victim; the size of the snake itself and whether it has bitten any other creature recently; and the amount of venom that has actually entered the victim's blood stream. The average time in which death normally occurs might be as follows:

In the case of the hamadryad, about ninety minutes; the krait, two to three hours; the cobra, four to six hours; the Russell's viper, twelve to thirty-six hours; and the saw-scaled viper, anything from three to seven days.

The nonpoisonous snakes of India are very many in number. Perhaps the most interesting is the python or rock-snake, which may measure up to eighteen feet in length, while the Malayan variety grows to thirty-five feet. It kills its victim by coiling around it and crushing it to death, after which it swallows the whole animal. The victims, of course, range in size from rats and rabbits to pigs and small deer, according to the size and capacity of the snake itself. During the Burma campaign against the Japanese an account was given of the shooting of a 'reticulated python'—which is the name given to the Malayan species which is also to be found in Burma—over forty feet in length. In its death-throes it vomited the body of a Jap soldier it had swallowed, complete with helmet. I do not vouch for the truth of this story, although it appeared in the Press. The idea that a python covers its victim with slime before swallowing it is quite erroneous. Its jaws, like those of all snakes, are not hinged together, but are quite separate units. The outer skin being very elastic, it is easy to see that a snake can swallow creatures several times the size of its head and girth.

Other nonpoisonous snakes include many varieties of ground

snakes; several species of very slender whip-like and fast-moving tree snakes; stout, lethargic worm-like sand snakes; and a large number of fresh-water snakes. One of the sand snakes possesses a blunt tail which looks like a second head, so much so that it is still widely believed that this reptile has two heads, one at either end.

I have always been fascinated by snakes, and for no other apparent reason I formed the habit of keeping them as pets at the age of eight years. As a result, I was considered quite frightful among the girls and something of a terror at school. I know I got quite a kick out of releasing reptiles in cinemas, in Sunday school and even in Church. The name of 'snake-charmer Anderson' still clings to me to this day, in my forty-eighth year.

Snake venom has many medicinal uses, and I am certain is a still unknown remedy for many ailments and conditions. The fact is that this field has not yet been thoroughly investigated and exploited owing to the danger consequent upon experimenting on a human being with these venoms. Viperine poison in small diluted doses and in accordance with the laws of homoeopathy, where the small dose of a particular poison is known to counteract a large dose of that same poison has been proved of, sterling value for the very condition of haemorrhage which it produces when a large or lethal dose is administered. This venom is used by dentists and others to stop excessive bleeding after a tooth extraction or minor operation.

Similarly, colubrine venoms, which in large doses bring about a complete collapse of the nervous system, are efficacious in minute doses in cases of epilepsy and other nervous complaints.

The Haffkine Institute in Bombay prepares a series of anti-venom injections as an antidote for the bites of all five poisonous species, obtainable separately for any of the varieties, provided the offending snake has been identified; or in a combined form for all the species, if there is no certainty as to by which snake a person has been bitten. The serum is prepared by progressively injecting horses with increasing quantities of snake-venom, beginning with a minute dose, till they become immune and are able to tolerate three to four times a lethal dose without ill-effect. Then blood is drawn from a vein in the thigh of the horse so immunised, and from this blood the anti-venom serum is eventually prepared.

When I came to hear of how the serum was prepared I was greatly intrigued and determined to prepare my own stock. I procured two old ponies and a donkey from sources I still hesitate to reveal and started to immunise them with initial doses of cobra poison, injected with a small 3 cc hypodermic syringe I had bought for the purpose. Unfortunately my knowledge in those days of the initial dose to be given was rather sketchy, with the result that within a very few hours

I had to arrange for the disposal of the corpses of the said two ponies and the donkey. I also recollect that my father was very annoyed.

Just before the last war I was doing quite a good business in exporting snake venom in crystallised form to interested institutions in the USA, particularly cobra venom. The average cobra produces roughly one cubic centimetre of venom every four to five days, which when crystallised weighs about one gramme, for which I was getting approximately one and a half dollars. I had twenty cobras, which therefore earned me thirty dollars worth of poison every five days, or a hundred and eighty dollars a month. Not a bad business considering the snakes cost me nothing whatever to feed beyond a frog or lizard each every ten days. These were caught for me by a fifteen-year-old Indian boy, such a servant being known as a 'chokra'. His salary for this work was seven rupees a month which, shall we say, is the equivalent of ten shillings in English money.

The venom is collected from a reptile by holding it by the neck with its mouth pressed against a glass cup covered by a thin piece of diaphragm rubber or bladder-skin. The snake bites the rubber, and in doing so ejects the poison from its glands, which trickles into the cup. The idea of the very thin rubber is to avoid loss of venom at the surface. Some care has to be taken not to injure the reptile by allowing it to break its teeth against the glass. Some layers of electrical insulating-tape around the edge of the cup serves this purpose.

Cobras are easily handled, as they expose their heads by raising themselves for about a third of their length off the ground while inflating their hoods. It is then comparatively simple to press a stick down firmly across the back of the hood, pin the snake to the ground and grip it by the back of its neck. Russell's vipers, saw-scaled vipers and kraits are far more dangerous, both because they hide their heads beneath the coiled folds of their own bodies and are, moreover, exceedingly quick in movement, far outclassing the cobra. In addition, the exceedingly long and rotatable fangs of a Russell's viper make him a nasty customer, requiring very careful handling.

Cobras in general are also easily tamed. The specimens in the itinerant snake charmer's basket have been rendered harmless by removing their fangs and poison-sacs. The fangs grow again, roughly in a month's time, but once the poison-sac is removed the reptile is harmless for life, as the venom cannot be secreted. A Russell's viper's poison-sacs cannot be removed because they are situated very near the brain and close to a big artery in the mouth. An operation to remove the sac causes this snake to die not only of blood, but it injures the brain, to which it succumbs in a short while. The snake-charmers therefore stitch the upper and lower lips together at both corners with

needle and thread, and feed the unfortunate reptile once a week through a bone funnel inserted down the throat from the centre of the mouth. An egg-flip is the usual nourishment. The same artificial and forced feeding is practised on cobras that frequently refuse to swallow their natural food when in captivity.

Their habit of infrequent eating is what makes all snakes so easy to keep. Normally a meal of a rat, frog, lizard or small bird will be sufficient for a period of a week or ten days, according to the size of the snake. In this respect, strange to say, the smaller species are more voracious than the larger. Pythons eat less frequently, at intervals of fifteen days to a month, according to the size of the animal that formed the last meal.

In writing this rather long account of snakes my purpose was to depict the interesting features shown by each of them. One feature is common to all snakes, both poisonous and nonpoisonous, except, it is said, the hamadryad; that they are all afraid of and avoid man. They will not go out of their way to attack or bite a human, but will do their utmost to slither away out of sight when hearing one approach, and will only bite if actually trodden upon. This they do out of fear and in self-defence. Incidentally it is useful to know that snakes have no sense of hearing through an organ resembling an ear. Their 'hearing' lies in the ability to feel vibrations through their bodies. Thus the stories we hear of a snake-charmer's flute, and other musical instruments and sounds, 'charming' a cobra are a myth. It is not the snake-charmer's music that holds their attention, but the rhythmic swaying of his body, head and hands when playing the instrument the causes the cobra to move itself from side to side in keeping with his motions while watching them. By this token, shouting, singing or whistling when walking along some dark footpath in India will not serve to frighten away a lurking snake, whereas heavy boots or the tapping of a stick against the ground most definitely will.

Every snake casts its outer layer of skin two to three times a year. This comes off 'inside-out' in the manner of a removed sock or glove, and is accomplished by the snake rubbing and coiling itself against some rough surface or obstacle.

Both poisonous and nonpoisonous snakes are classified generally under two headings—oviparous or viviparous. The former lay eggs, which hatch out after some days, whereas the latter give birth to living youngsters. The possession or absence of venom has no bearing on this factor, as both poisonous and harmless species are to be found under each heading. For instance, the cobra lays eggs, whereas the Russell's viper and python give birth to their young alive.

Of all the five species of poisonous snakes, the ordinary cobra lives to a great extent close to human beings and will be found inhabiting

ant hills and other holes in every field or near any dwelling-place. Strangely, he is rarely met with in a jungle. The hamadryad is just the opposite, as I have already said, and keeps entirely to the jungle. Russell's vipers are found more in forests and grassy places than near human habitations. Kraits are not very common anywhere, and the saw-scaled viper lives mostly in arid, sandy regions.

When in the jungle, short of carrying tubes of anti-venom injections, which in any case require to be kept in a refrigerator because they decompose rapidly, the only reliable remedy for a bite from a poisonous snake is immediate deep cutting into the wound with a sharp knife, followed by sucking out as much of the poisoned blood in the vicinity as possible, in order to minimise the quantity of venom absorbed. Incidentally, none of the venoms are poisonous if swallowed, so that there is no fear of secondary symptoms due to this sucking-out of poisoned blood. In fact, cobra venom is fed to trained cocks and partridges in order to make them more aggressive when participating in the staged fights often conducted by the Moslems in this part of India. High sums of money are placed as bets on the winner, and this is one of the standard methods of winning the jackpot.

The tying of an effective ligature above the bite requires time and some skill. Also the method is impracticable if the person happens to be bitten anywhere on the trunk. In any case, before the ligature can be effectively tightened, the venom has invariably entered the bloodstream. Pouring crystals of potassium permanganate into the bite helps to neutralize the venom to a slight extent through chemical action, but deep incisions have first to be made before the crystals can effectively penetrate the tissues and play their part. For this reason I always carry a small razor-sharp penknife in my pocket when in the jungle.

I know a man who was bitten in the foot by a cobra. He was a poacher and he had the presence of mind to pour a heap of the loose gunpowder he was carrying in a bag for his muzzle-loader on to and around the bitten part. Then he ignited the powder with a match, with the result that he burned a deep hole in his leg which still causes him to walk with a slight limp. But he lived. I know another man, a snake-charmer, who was bitten through his thumb by a cobra. He placed a knife over the second joint and brought a heavy stone sharply down on the back of the knife with his free hand, requiring more than one blow to complete the amputation. He must have suffered agony and almost bled to death; nevertheless, he pulled through and is alive today. In a third instance I was once camped at Muttur forest bungalow when a man awoke me at dawn to say he had been bitten in the foot by a cobra nearly an hour earlier. He said he was a cartman

returning to Pennagram with a cartload of cut bamboos; the evening before he had encountered a herd of wild elephants by the roadside. Being afraid, he had turned his cart about and returned to the fellers' camp. About 4 a.m. that morning he had set forth again, walking behind his cart so as to be able to escape more easily if he ran into the elephants again. Probably the cartwheel had passed over the snake and injured it. He said he felt a sharp pain and looked down to see a snake fastened on to his foot. He kicked out, and the snake let go and made off, but not before he had had time to see by the inflated hood that it was a cobra. After being bitten he had walked the two miles to the bungalow, hoping someone could help him. I lost no time in lancing the wound deeply, and with the aid of a forest guard walked him up and down the verandah to keep him from falling into a coma. But it was not long before I could see that my efforts would be in vain. The unfortunate cartman began to drool at the mouth, his eyes rolled upwards, he staggered like a drunken man and his speech became inarticulate. I managed to get his name and that of his family, who lived in the village of Erigollanur, a mile beyond Pennagram. Then he suddenly became a dead weight in our arms. He had lost consciousness. By 8.30 a.m. he was dead. I sent the forest guard to inform his relatives and the Pennagram police. The relatives came in a bullock-cart by 2 p.m., and set up a loud wailing. Then came the police. They wanted to know why there were blood marks all over the floor of the forest bungalow where we had walked the man about; why I had cut him; why he had died. Finally the corpse was put into the bullock-cart and sent to the police station, and I was asked to go too. I refused point-blank. The chief constable pondered over my refusal awhile and then compromised with instructions that I should remain in the forest bungalow till the results of the post-mortem, which would be held on the dead man, had been reported. I readily agreed to do that. Then the party left for Pennagram, seven miles away, from where the body was sent by bus to the General Hospital at Salem town, forty-two miles distant, for a post-mortem. Back came the answer after three days. The cartman had died of cobra bite. On the fourth day the police informed me that I was no longer under suspicion.

In the whole thirty-nine years during which I have handled snakes, I have been bitten only once, and then by a cobra. It happened in 1939. I had just caught the snake when it slipped from my grasp and bit me on the second finger of my left hand. But I am still alive; nor did I have to blow up or cut off my finger. For fortunately the incident happened on some land I own nine miles out of Bangalore and I was able to drive in my car to hospital and receive antivenom treatment. As a result, the bite itself produced no unpleasant symptoms; but the

injection certainly did, for on the third day I suffered a very severe reaction and temporary partial paralysis of both legs. However, calcium and other injections put that right within a day.

In conclusion, I would like to mention a strange belief that was widely held in southern India, that a stationmaster named Narasiah, working at Polreddipalyam Station on the Southern Railway and situated not very far from the city of Madras, could cure any person of poisonous snakebite provided he was informed by telegram. The belief became so widespread that the railway authorities gave preference on its own telegraph system to any such message addressed to this stationmaster. I had heard many accounts of his miraculous cures from authentic sources, and there are hundreds of people alive in southern India today whose lives were saved by him. The *modus operandi* was that, as soon as Mr Narasiah received a telegram informing him of someone being bitten, he would go to a certain tree growing in the station yard, tear off a shred of his *dhoti* or loin cloth, tie it to a branch of the tree, say a prayer, and then send a telegram in reply informing the patient that he would live provided he abstained from tobacco, alcohol and coffee. Invariably the victim survived.

Alas! Mr Narasiah had to answer the great call himself and has since passed away. But he will never be forgotten. I do not know if his secret died with him, but I fear so, as no reports of any successor to his healing work in the realm of snakebite have come to me since then.

Six

The Killer From Hyderabad

NORTH OF MYSORE STATE, IN THE DAYS OF THE BRITISH RAJ, LAY THE districts of Bellary, Anantapur, Kurnool and Nandyal, all belonging to the former Madras Presidency. North of these again lay Hyderabad state, which was the dominion of the Nizam of Hyderabad, a staunch ally of the British regime and a descendant of a ruler who was an off-shoot of the once all-powerful Mohammedan Moghul Emperor at Delhi.

Hyderabad state now no longer exists and part of the Nizam's wide dominions have been amalgamated with Anantapur, Kurnool and Nandyal to form a portion of the linguistic Telugu state of Andhra Pradesh, which is about the second largest in the new Union of India, being exceeded in area only by Madhya Pradesh to the north.

However, this story dates from long ago when these areas, although predominantly Telugu-speaking, belonged to Madras.

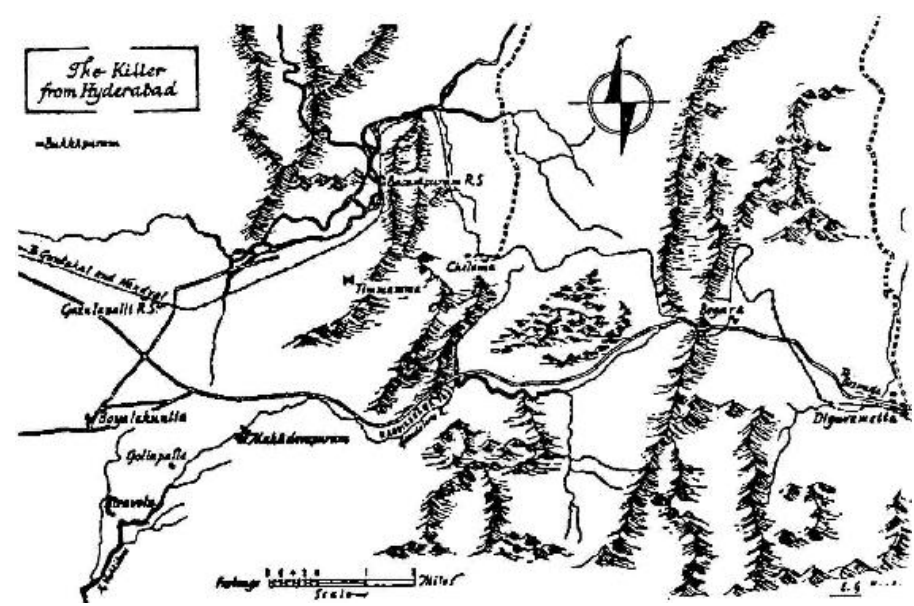
In those days these districts were largely undeveloped because the rainfall was scarce, the climate viciously hot for ten months of the year (while the remaining two months are simply uncomfortably hot) and the population by no means dense. Except for the towns of Anantapur, Kurnool and Nandyal, which gave their names to the districts of which they formed the capitals, the rest of the land was peopled by small villages scattered widely over the area.

The railway line from Bombay to Madras was the principal arterial link which traversed the districts. It passed through a railway colony known as Guntakal Junction. This main arterial link was a broad-

gauge section, with its lines 5 ft. 6 ins. apart. At Guntakal three separate metre-gauge sections branched off. One led westwards towards Bellary and Hubli; one led southwards towards Bangalore in Mysore state; the third led eastwards, passing through Dronachellam and Nandyal to Bezwada, and thence to the east coast of India. At Bezwada it linked up with another broad-gauge arterial section joining Madras and Calcutta, while at Dronachellam a metre-gauge line branched northeastwards to Secunderabad and Hyderabad. The metre-gauge engines and rolling stock were naturally smaller and much lighter than those of the broad-gauge lines.

After leaving Guntakal, Dronachellam and Nandyal, the eastern metre-gauge line passes through an area of forest for five stations, named in order Gazulapalli, Basavapuram, Chelama, Bogara and Diguvametta, before going on to Bezwada. This forested portion, which forms the setting of my story, is more or less in the midst of a jungle belt stretching northwards across the Krishna river into the former Hyderabad state, and southwards towards the town of Cuddapah.

The metre-gauge trains are slow, and it is still a common experience for the drivers of the up and down mails that pass in the night to see wild animals running across the lines in the beam of the engine's headlight, or to run down a wild pig or a deer that attempts a last-minute crossing.



From the five stations which I have named only rough and stony cart-tracks and footpaths wend their way into the surrounding jungle.

There were no motorable roads in those days. This was one of the main factors that helped to preserve the fauna of the locality from being badly shot-up, as has happened in jungle areas traversed by good roads. Enthusiastic but misguided and unsporting hunters use these good roads by spending their time from dusk to dawn shining spotlights from motorcars into the jungle and shooting at any animal whose eyes reflect the glare. More often than not these hunters are not even aware of the kind or nature of the animal at which they fire. This wanton and wicked practice has done and continues increasingly to do immense damage to wild animals, as the females and young of all species are being indiscriminately slaughtered, while a still larger number crawl away sorely wounded to die lingering and agonizing deaths in the jungle. The British government in its time tried to stop this poaching, and the Indian government is still trying. The first was, and the second is, altogether unsuccessful, and the terrible havoc still goes on. What is more, this will always be the case till either the public becomes conscious of the fact that wild life is a national asset and should not be wantonly destroyed; or alternatively, until wild life itself is completely wiped out.

However, as I have said, because of the fortunate absence of motorable roads, the Gazulapalli-Diguvametta area has so far been spared to some extent the curse of the night-prowling motorcar butcher, and there one may camp in the jungle reasonably sure of not hearing the hum of a car, followed by a dazzling beam of light, the sudden cessation of sound as the car is brought to a halt, the report of a gun or rifle and perhaps the agonized shriek of a wounded or dying animal.

The indigenous inhabitants of this area are a Telugu-speaking tribe known as Chenchus. Like all aborigines, they go about scantily clad, the main items of clothing in both men and women being torn and dirty loin cloths. The men carry bows and arrows, and most of them adorn themselves with beads or feathers around their necks. Peacock feathers are a favourite ornament for special occasions when stuck into their matted hair. They are fond of alcoholic liquor, which they make from the juice of the sticky *mhowa* flower, or from the bark of the *babul* tree. Indeed, because of the presence and abundance of the *mhowa* tree, these people were always a great problem to the excise officers in the days of British rule, and they are a still far greater problem to the Andhra government where the policy of 'Prohibition' prevails in certain parts of the state.

However, this tale did not set out to be a protest against night shooting from cars, nor as a discussion of the policy of 'prohibition'; nor is it even a sketch of life of the Chenchus. It concerns a man-eating tiger that terrorized the area, off and on, for some four years.

This animal began his activities in the forests which belonged to Hyderabad state, where he fed on Chenchus and lonely travellers for half a year before he wandered southwards and dramatically announced his arrival at Chelama by carrying off and devouring a ganger who left the station early one morning on a routine patrol of the railway line in the direction of Basavapuram to the west.

In those days, particularly, the area was always well stocked with tigers, but these, due to the plentiful supply of natural game, seldom interfered with the local people except occasionally to carry off cattle. The disappearance of the ganger was therefore not attributed to a man-eating tiger at the time, as his remains were never found, and it was thought he had just decamped from the area for reasons of his own. Only in the months that followed, when Chenchus vanished here and there, were suspicions aroused that something untoward was happening, and people began to think that a tiger might be the cause of these disappearances. Even then there was no definite evidence of the presence of this man-eater, as tiger tracks along the jungle *paths* were common and there was nothing to connect the missing ganger and other Chenchus with earlier victims in the more distant northern parts of the jungle within Hyderabad state.

It was some three or four moths after the incident of the ganger that this tiger revealed his presence. Two charcoal burners were returning one evening to a tiny hamlet known as Wadapally, near the fringe of the forest. They were walking one behind the other when about half a mile before reaching their destination the leading man noticed the speckled form of a hen-koel fly from a nest rather high in a tree. Now you may wonder why I stress that this bird was a hen-koel of speckled plumage. It is because the male koel is jet black and therefore quite unidentifiable with the female, which is a deep grey speckled with white. The koel is perhaps the largest member of the cuckoo family, the Indian 'brain-fever bird' being another. Like all cuckoos, the koels do not build their own nests, but lay their eggs in the nests of other birds and leave the hatching to them.

Now the fact that the leading Chenchu had seen the speckled hen fly from a nest was irrefutable evidence that she had just laid an egg there. Chenchus not only find koel's eggs hard to come by, because they might be laid in any bird's nest, but they regard them as a great delicacy. He drew the attention of his companion to the lucky circumstance. The second man, who was younger, began to climb the tree with the intention of plundering the eggs. He had almost reached his objective when he heard a scream below him. Looking down, he was amazed to see a tiger walking away into the jungle with his companion dangling from the beast's mouth and screaming for help.

The man on the tree scrambled to its topmost branches while the

tiger faded from sight with his still-wailing victim.

Night fell, but the Chenchu in the tree dared not risk coming down. He spent the next twelve hours there, shivering with fear and cold, and expecting the return of the tiger at any moment. Next morning, when the sun was well up, he started yelling at the top of his voice in the hope that someone on the outskirts of Wadapally might hear him. The wind happened to be blowing in that direction and his cries were eventually heard, when a party of villagers set forth to find out what it was all about.

Thus it was that the man-eater officially announced his presence in the Chelama area.

The Chenchus from Wadapally conveyed the news to the stationmaster at Chelama, who telegraphed up the line to Nandyal, from where in turn the news was conveyed to the Police, the forestry department, the railway authorities, and to the Collector of the district. Tongues began to wag, and the various mysterious disappearances of the other Chenchus and of the ganger, four months previously, were linked together and laid at the door of the man-eater.

Normally, when the presence of a man-eater in any particular area of jungle is confirmed, the Forestry Department throws open the surrounding forests for 'free shooting' without licence, to encourage hunters to eliminate the killer. This step was automatically taken, but the announcement by the Forestry Department met with no appreciable response, because few sportsmen cared to try their hand at bagging a man-eater in a district almost bereft of roads, where they would need to walk every inch of the ground without any transport.

One or two railway officials made half-hearted attempts by 'trolleying' up and down the line between Gazulapalli and Chelama with loaded rifles expecting, or at least hoping, to come across the tiger very obligingly seated beside the track, just waiting to be shot. But their expectations and their hopes did not work out, nor did the man-eater oblige. And not only did they see no tiger, but more Chenchus began to fall victims to the invisible devil week by week, till the death toll, inclusive of the ganger, rose to eleven. Of these only two victims were followed up by bands of villagers armed with staves, hatchets and bows and arrows, and their scattered remains recovered. No trace was found of the others, due both to the difficult terrain and the unwillingness of the people to risk their lives in attempting to save what they well knew to be carcasses already half-eaten.

Such behaviour may be regarded as indifferent and callous. But I would remind the reader that these poor folk were unarmed and not organized to deal with the man-eater. The jungle covered a vast expanse of heavy forest, with but few footpaths winding through the dense undergrowth, piled boulders and wooded ravines which lay in

all directions. Everybody knew that should the man-eater be bold enough to charge a group of persons, at least one of them would fall a victim. Nobody wanted to be that victim. So who could reasonably blame them for not venturing out? In true eastern philosophy there seemed to be no sense in sacrificing another life to find the body of one who was already dead.

After these eleven killings, the man-eater appeared to have left the area for some time, as no further incidents were reported there for three or four months, though they began to appear again near the Krishna river. Then, and then only, did it become apparent that the former Hyderabad man-eater and the man-eater of Chelama were one and the same animal.

In Hyderabad state the call for hunters to kill the tiger met with greater response, and one or two of the Mahommedan Nawabs (or landowners) started active operations against the animal. Eventually the tiger overplayed his role by killing a traveller quite close to a hamlet named Madikonda. In this case he was driven off before he had time to eat even a portion of his victim, and news of the incident was carried to the Nawab of the area, who happened to be in camp a few miles away.

The Nawab answered the call and came posthaste to the spot, very fortunately before the body of the victim had been removed for cremation, and he was able to construct a *machan* on an adjacent tree in which to await the tiger's return to its undevoured prey. Being a nomad, the unfortunate victim had no relatives in the locality to claim his body, and this factor had provided the only chance this tiger had so far afforded of being shot.

But at this stage the Nawab's good luck was impaired by an unexpected thunderstorm which almost synchronized with the return of the tiger. Or that was what the Nawab claimed. Whatever the cause, he unluckily failed to kill it when he fired, and the morning light revealed a few traces of blood which had not been washed away by the rain. At least, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had hit the tiger, although nobody was able to follow up and locate its carcass the next day. The Nawab hoped that it was dead, and so did everybody else.

Again an interval of some weeks elapsed. Then a Chenchu, who devoted his time to snaring partridges and jungle fowl near Gazulapalli, failed to return home for his midday meal. He had set out that morning on a visit to the traps that he had placed in various parts of the jungle the day before, saying he would be back by noon, as was his habit. But midday passed and the shades of evening fell and still he did not show up, and his wife and only son, a boy of twenty, grew anxious. Of course they had heard of the killings in the vicinity of

Chelama, but those had taken place some months previously and everyone had since forgotten about the incidents. Now, with the absence of the trapper who was the breadwinner of the family, their misgivings and fears returned in full force.

In recording the exploits of man-eaters, it is rather noticeable that they follow a more or less regular pattern of happenings. The 'villain of the piece,' the aforesaid man-eater, makes his appearance suddenly, generally after being incapacitated from pursuing his natural prey through being wounded by some hunter. More rarely he, or quite as frequently she, has learned the habit from a parent who had a weakness for human flesh. The killings of human beings, few and far between at first, increase in number as the animal gains confidence in its own prowess and power over the helplessness of the human race as a whole. A strange feature in all man-eaters, whether tiger or panther, is the fact that, despite their growing contempt for humanity in general, a subtle sixth-sense of caution, which some hunters think is cowardice, pervades their whole nature. They will always attack the victim unawares, generally when he is alone or at least at the end, or at the head of, a moving file of persons. Instances are very very rare, indeed, when such a man-eater has charged a group of people. On the other hand, instances have been many in which the would-be victim has resisted and somehow fought for his life, and the man-eater has abandoned its attack and fled. This is more the case with panthers than with tigers, for the simple reason that the latter are such powerful animals that few live to tell the tale once a charge has been driven home. It is this inherent caution or cowardice, call it what you like, which is the common feature of all man-eaters and makes their early destruction a most difficult problem. As various attempts to circumvent them are made, and fail, the hunted animal naturally becomes more and more cautious and cunning as it appears to realize that a special price has been placed upon its head.

The man-eating tiger has a habit of following a particular 'beat' or route, which may extend over some hundreds of miles, halting in the vicinity of villages or hamlets for a week or two and then moving on again. In this way, not only does he escape when things are becoming too hot for him, but he arrives at fresh pastures and fields of opportunity where the inhabitants are unaware of his coming. By the same token, when he leaves a particular locality and the killings cease, the natural apathy and forgetfulness of the villagers makes them feel that the danger has passed and they become careless in their movements, ensuring another easy victim for the tiger when he eventually comes that way again. For he works around the territory in a huge and rough circle, and according to the extent of his beat will surely pass that way once more—maybe after a month or two, maybe

much longer.

As I have mentioned earlier in this book, if one has the patience, and provided sufficient information is available, which is often most difficult to achieve, with the aid of a map of the area and by means of marking with a cross the locality of each human kill with the date on which it occurred, it is possible to assess not only the whole extent and area of the tiger's range of operations, but to anticipate its return to each locality within the margin of a fortnight. This is one of the main factors that helps the hunter who scientifically plans the killing of a man-eating tiger to accomplish his task.

In the case of a panther there is no evidence of a regular beat. He is here, there and everywhere. He kills mainly at night and very rarely during the hours of daylight. Being small, a man-eating panther can hide anywhere. As he grows bolder and bolder he often reaches a stage where he attacks and drags inmates out of their huts. I believe there are few authenticated cases of tigers doing this. On the other hand, a tiger will attack his human prey at any time of the day, lying in ambush beside forest *paths* or near the outskirts of a village.

I have related the story of the coming of the 'Chelama Man-eater', or, as he came to be better known, the 'Killer from Hyderabad', as I pieced together the facts at a much later date. To follow his exploits in detail after he killed and partially ate the Chenchu bird-trapper who used to live in Gazulapalli, and whose remains incidentally were recovered by his son, might bore you. Each incident was much the same in nature, the tiger repeatedly changing his location between the Gazulapalli-Chelama section in the south and the Krishna river in Hyderabad to the north. This area of operations was immense, as you will understand if you glance at the map. Moreover, after the wound inflicted on him by the Nawab at Madikonda, he doubled and redoubled his normal man-eater-like caution, till he gained the reputation of being a very devil incarnate—a sort of supernatural fiend. That unfortunate affairs caused him to adopt the practice of eating as much as possible of his human victim immediately after the killing, when he would abandon the body and very rarely return for a second meal. Not only did this habit immeasurably increase the difficulties of the few *shikaris* who went after him, but the killings themselves soon increased in number as the tiger was forced to prey on a fresh victim more often than would ordinarily be the case in order to appease his hunger, each time abandoning the remains of the last one. The area being large and remote, little publicity was given to the animal's depredations; and when it was given, all that appeared was a brief paragraph in one of the local newspapers, at infrequent and sporadic intervals, informing a disinterested public that the man-eater had claimed yet another victim. In this manner, in some three

and a half years of activity, the tiger accounted for about eighty persons before serious notice began to be taken of the very real menace he had become.

The death of eighty persons in the jaws of a single tiger might appear colossal to the man living in a city. It certainly is so by all Western standards. But in a land as vast as India, where the average expectancy of life is at present well below thirty years, and in former days was very much lower—where famine, flood and sickness account yearly for thousands of lives; where snakebite causes the deaths of many thousands more; and where the birth rate is advancing to an alarming figure each year in spite of early mortality and all the causes of death—eighty people being eaten by a tiger was but a drop in the ocean, and nothing to worry about unduly. Indeed, relatively speaking, it reflected in the tiger's favour as a connoisseur in human flesh, considering the fact that he had only achieved this total in a period of some 1,300 days. It not only dubbed him as a very modest eater of human-beings, but what was very important to the hunter, indicated that he was obviously varying his human diet by killing animals for food, both domestic and wild. He would therefore not be averse to taking a bait should the hunter afford him the opportunity.

Apart from the man-eater of course, there were many other tigers, and panthers too, operating both in the Hyderabad jungles and to the south, so that the number of cattle and other domestic animals killed each year was always large. It was impossible under the circumstances even to guess how many of these 'natural' kills could be ascribed to the man-eater, and how many had been made by other carnivora; but it was certain that the man-eater had been responsible for a number of them for, as has already been indicated, he could not have subsisted on human kills alone for such a length of time. Here was another favourable feature. The man-eater could be baited with tethered cattle provided the hunter was able to estimate his line of 'beat' and could reasonably forecast his visit to a locality by allowing a plus or minus factor of a fortnight each way, before and after his due date of arrival. This plus or minus factor could be worked out on the map from his earlier record of kills.

I had read accounts in the Press from time to time about the depredations of this animal, and had received quite a few letters from officials in the Forestry department inviting me to try my luck at bagging it. To these I had turned a deaf ear, mainly because I found it difficult to spare the time from my work for a protracted visit, and also because the area in which it was operating was much too far from Bangalore to permit me to get there in time after receiving news of his arrival in any particular locality or of a human kill. At the same time, I have always been interested in news of the presence of a man-eater,

be it panther or tiger, and the doings of a 'rogue' elephant. In this case I had already written to the Forestry department and Police authorities of both the Madras presidency and Hyderabad state to obtain all possible information about the animal, together with the most important data: the localities where human kills had occurred and the dates on which they had been perpetrated. This data I had jotted down on a map of the place and date of each incident. Thereafter, a study of the map indicated that this animal appeared to spend from two to three months operating between Gazulapalli and Chelama, before moving northwards into Hyderabad for the next four months or so. Then it returned again. The distance from Gazulapalli to Basavapuram is six miles, and from Basavapuram to Chelama five miles, and allowing for overlapping forest tracts the whole stretch of jungle between these areas covered a distance of about fifteen miles. Not only were these stations much closer to Bangalore than the more distant areas in Hyderabad, but they were much smaller in area, and were linked by part of the metre-gauge system of railway to Bangalore. The Hyderabad sections were not, and no motorable roads connected them. Lastly, the southern area was more populated, and I could therefore expect greater cooperation and earlier news of a 'kill' than would ordinarily be the case were I to start operations in the Hyderabad jungle.

You will see, then, that I had been toying with the idea of making an attempt for some time, when my indecision was brought to an end by the tiger himself. This happened when a permanent-way inspector (P.W.I.) on the railway was one morning carrying out a routine inspection of the line from Chelama towards Basavapuram by trolley. On the Indian railways these trolleys are simple wooden platforms on two pairs of wheels. The platform itself is scarcely more than six feet long, surmounted by a rough bench on which the railway officer sits. It is pushed by two coolies called 'trolley-men', who run along barefooted on the rails themselves. Practice makes them experts at placing their feet on the rails, necessitated in addition by the fact that were they to miss the rail and tread on the ballast they would find it very painful. They push the trolley uphill at a walking pace, run along the rails at some eight miles per hour where level ground prevails, and jump on at the back of the trolley when a downhill section is reached. The officer controls the speed of the trolley by a handbrake, and the whole assembly is lifted off the line at stations to make way for passing trains.

That day the trolley was negotiating a cutting through rising ground, when the P.W.I. applied his brakes and stopped it to get down and examine the ditches which draw off rain-water on either side of the track. The party had plenty of time at their disposal, as the next

train was not due for another two hours. One of the trolley-men remained seated on the trolley, while the P.W.I. walked along the side of the ditch. The other man climbed up the bank of the cutting, which was about seven feet in height, seated himself on the top and took out a *beedi*. This is the name given to cheap Indian cigarettes made of uncured tobacco wrapped in its own leaf. He contentedly lit it and began to smoke.

The P.W.I. walked further away from the trolley, the man seated on it lay back and began to doze, while the smoker on top of the bank threw away the stump of his first beedi, took another and lit it, drew the smoke deeply into his lungs and regarded his superior officer with disinterested eyes while expelling the smoke from his nostrils.

The ditch had not unduly eroded and, after walking a hundred yards or so, the P.W.I. turned around to cross the line and retrace his steps along the other side and inspect the ditch there. As he did so, he glanced backwards and saw the trolley with the coolie sleeping on it, and then glanced upwards to the other coolie seated on top of the cutting smoking his second *beedi*. On either side the jungle bordered the line to within fifty yards, but some stray bushes had sprung up and grew much nearer. The P.W.I. noticed one such bush—a rather larger one—growing a little way beyond the smoker and what appeared to be a round 'something' sticking out from one side of it. This 'something' moved. The glare from the sun was reflected by the leaves of the bush in a myriad of scintillating points of light. In contrast the lower portion of the bush and the round 'something' lay in shadow. The mysterious object moved again, and the P.W.I. stared, wondering what it could be. Then it seemed to flatten itself and merge with the ground, and was completely lost to sight.

He crossed the track and started walking back to the trolley. Now his eyes scanned the opposite ditch. He had dismissed the object from his mind. But that was only for a few seconds. For he heard a piercing shriek. He looked up in time to see the coolie on the embankment being drawn backwards and then vanishing from sight, still screaming. Wondering what could be the matter with the man, the P.W.I. ran up the bank of the cutting to get a better view, when he saw a large tiger walking calmly away into the jungle with the coolie trailing from his mouth, his hands and legs kicking feebly. Then the tiger and the man were seen no more.

The P.W.I. was too shocked to move, but stood transfixed to the spot for a full minute or so. Then he was galvanised into action. He rushed down the bank to the railway track and pounded back along it towards the trolley as fast as he could. Meanwhile the sleeping coolie had been awakened by his companion's screams. In his confused state of mind he was not aware of what noise had actually awakened him,

or of what was happening. He looked up to see his officer running towards him.

When the P.W.I. reached the trolley he shouted at the stupefied coolie, '*Bagh Reddi ku laikka gaiya*' (a tiger has taken Reddi) followed by the words, *Trolley ku dhakkalao, juldhi*' (push the trolley quickly). The coolie needed no further exhortation after that. Both of them commenced to push the trolley along the lines as hard as they could, till it reached the downward slope and began to roll on its own accord. Then they jumped on and allowed it to career madly downhill away from that dreadful place.

Much publicity was given in the Press to this latest killing, and the P.W.I. came in for severe criticism from all quarters, being dubbed a coward for deserting a fellow human being at a time of need, a moral murderer, and something which should have been born as an insect and not as a man. I wonder how many of his critics would have acted differently had they been in his place. You should remember it had all happened so suddenly. Further, he was completely unarmed.

I felt the time had come for me to try to meet this man-eater. So that night I was seated in the train that steamed out of Bangalore and the afternoon of the next day saw me detraining at Gazulapalli.

It seemed to me wisest to begin operations from one end of the area and work forwards towards Basavapuram and Chelama, rather than the other way round. To start haphazardly somewhere in the middle was unsystematic and depended too much on luck. Further, and most important of all, I needed local help and a guide, as I had little knowledge of the district, having visited it only casually once before. I had brought along with me the map on which I had marked the tiger's beat, and I hoped to be able to locate the son of the bird-trapper who had been one of the man-eater's earlier victims. I felt the youth would be a promising and useful ally.

As soon as the train drew out of the station I made friends with the stationmaster and the few members of the railway staff attached to the small station. When they became aware of my mission they clustered around and said that they were very glad that I had come, and that they would do everything they could to help me. I was a bit handicapped because the local dialect was Telugu, of which I could speak only a few words. This was partially compensated for by the fact that most people there seemed to understand a little Tamil and Hindustani, both of which languages I speak fairly well. Somehow we got along and could understand each other. The stationmaster of course knew English, and he became my main interpreter.

To begin with, I explained that it was essential I should know some more about this tiger, especially any peculiarities regarding his appearance or habits, in order that I should distinguish him from any

of the other tigers I might encounter. To this the station staff replied that all they knew was that he was a very large tiger. Of course, they had all seen tigers crossing the railway track from time to time, but they knew of no particular characteristic that would identify this tiger from any of the others. But, they suggested, one or other of the two forest guards who lived in the village might know better and be able to help me.

At this stage I asked if they could summon the son of the trapper who had been eaten by the tiger. They replied that they knew him by sight, but did not know exactly where he lived, beyond the fact that he lived somewhere in the jungle. They were sure the forest guards would be able to give me more information in this respect.

At my request a ganger was sent to call the forest guards, and in a matter of twenty minutes or so these individuals turned up. One of them was a Mahommedan named Ali Baig, with whom I could converse in Hindustani. The other was a Chenchu named Krishnappa, who spoke only Telugu. I waved them to the shade of a large mango tree growing behind the station, seated them on the ground, sat down myself and then got down to real business.

Using Ali Baig as an interpreter for the Chenchu forest guard, I played the opening gambit in the game of contacting the man-eater by offering a substantial reward to whoever first gave me the information that would lead me to it. At this both gentlemen pricked up their ears. Ali Baig said he would lead me to it even if it cost him his life. The Chenchu said—through Ali Baig—that he would do the same, except that he would not like to lose his life, and provided he knew exactly where the tiger was to be found, so as to be able to lead me there.

I appreciated that candid reply. Like all aborigines, I felt that the Chenchu was being truthful and practical too.

I began questioning them about the tiger. Both claimed to have seen him. Since the time the killings had begun they had never ventured into the jungle alone, but always together and armed with axes. Nor had they gone very far from the village. About ten days earlier they had seen a tiger crossing a fire-line about a mile away. The tiger had seen them too and had leapt into the jungle immediately. A month earlier they had encountered another, about nine o'clock in the morning, beside a water hole. That had also bounded away when they came into view. The occasion before that—it must have been about four months earlier—they had come upon a tiger hardly a quarter of a mile from the village; he had given them an anxious few moments, for he had not run away as other tigers had done. Rather, he had swung around, half-crouched, and growled loudly. They had been on the point of turning tail and running for their lives. But Krishnappa, the Chenchu guard, had whispered to Ali

Baig that they should both shout in unison. They had done that. The tiger growled in return but did not charge. He had hesitated and then walked away, looking back at them over his shoulder now and again, still growling. When he was out of sight they had hurried back to the village.

Something clicked in my mind: four months! The interval corresponded with my calculations on the map, and the unusual behaviour of the animal confirmed the idea. They had seen the man-eater on his last visit to Gazulapalli, without a doubt.

They both thought so too.

More exciting was the fact that the four-month cycle had again appeared: the tiger had killed the trolley-coolie between Chelama and Basavapuram, and he had been the last victim. If my calculations were correct and fate was kind, the tiger should now be anywhere between Basavapuram and Gazulapalli at that moment. I became more excited. Luck seemed to be favouring me. But would it hold out?

I questioned them more closely about the tiger that had growled at them. Had they noticed anything peculiar about him? Ali Baig said that he was a huge tiger. Krishnappa was sure that it was a male. He thought that it had a lighter, yellower coat than the average tiger. 'Remember, *sahib,*' he explained, 'we were very frightened at that time and had expected the tiger to charge us. Who would notice such things?'

I then asked them if they knew the boy I was looking for, the son of the Chenchu trapper I had read about as having been killed by the tiger much earlier. Of course they knew him. He lived in a hut in the jungle with his mother, wife and one child, over two miles away to the north. He was carrying on his father's profession as a bird-trapper, although how he was doing it with this 'shaitan' prowling about they could not imagine. It was against the forestry department's laws to trap birds in the Reserved Forest, and on several occasions during his lifetime they had prosecuted the father. But always he had carried on his profession after each case, and his son was doing the same thing now. Periodically, in the past, they had received a peafowl, or a brace of jungle fowl for their own stomachs, and this had often caused them to wink at the illegal practices of both father and son. Even these offerings had now ceased. But who could blame the poor boy? He must be finding it hard these days to trap birds for his own family, knowing this devil-tiger might be anywhere, behind or inside any bush.

I grew cheerful at the thought that I had found my first need—allies who would help me to locate my quarry. Scrambling to my feet, and slinging my .405 over my shoulder, I asked the two forest guards to lead me to this boy.

We crossed the railway lines and followed a footpath that wound into the forest. Light scrub gave way to heavier jungle, and soon we were walking in single file, Krishnappa leading with Ali Baig on his heels, while I brought up the rear. I had taken the precaution to load my rifle and carried it in the crook of my right arm, prepared for all eventualities. Not that we expected the tiger to attack just then, for we were three men together; but, should he make up his mind to do so, it was either Krishnappa in the lead, or myself at the end of the line, who were in any real danger. Ali Baig was quite safe as the middle man of the party.

After what appeared to me to be a distance of more like three miles than two, we crossed a stony channel through which a stream of water trickled, climbed a small hill and came upon the hut which was our objective. A pleasant-faced lad of about twenty years of age was seated at the open doorway, whittling bamboos with a sharp knife. Near at hand lay a half-completed contraption which I recognised as a bird-trap in the making.

At our approach he rose to his feet and *salaamed* respectfully. Krishnappa introduced me to him in the Telugu dialect, and the boy replied to him in a pleasant voice. Ali Baig then played his part as interpreter and told me that the boy's name was Bala. From the hut two female heads appeared, one of an old hag whom I took to be the boy's mother, and the other of a girl of about sixteen or seventeen. Supported by her arm, and contentedly sucking at her breast, was a naked infant about a year old. Without doubt, these were the lad's wife and son.

We squatted down on the grass a few feet from the hut and I began to ask questions, each of which Ali Baig translated to the boy in Telugu, translating also his reply. Krishnappa broke in frequently, clarifying some point that was vague to one or the other. Yes, he was certainly willing to help the white *dorai* to kill the tiger, for had it not devoured his own father? No, he would not accept money or reward in any form. His father's spirit would be very angry with him if he did so for, as his only son, the spirit expected him to claim vengeance on his slayer by direct means if possible, or at least to bring about the death of the tiger somehow. Oh yes, he had often seen the man-eater with his own eyes. Once he had gone down to the very rivulet we had just crossed to bring a pot of water to the hut. It had been about noon, just before the family had sat down to their midday meal. As he had dipped the pot into the stream, he had happened to look up and saw a tiger slinking down the opposite bank. Fortunately he had seen the beast in time, perhaps a hundred yards away, creeping directly towards him. He had left the pot of water and bolted for the shelter of the hut, where the family had closed and barricaded the door of

thorns as best they could, expecting the man-eater to make an onslaught on the flimsy structure at any moment. Nothing had happened. He had very often heard the tiger calling at night, and he frequently came to drink at the rivulet. He was a large male tiger, with a rather pale yellow coat. Did the *sahib* want to know if he had seen anything peculiar about this tiger? Then Bala closed his eyes in thought; finally he looked up with a hopeful expression. All he could say was that the black stripes across the pale brownish-yellow skin were abnormally narrow. Would that help the *dorai*? He had seen very many tigers in his short life, but he could not remember ever having seen another with such narrow stripes.

When had he last seen the tiger? Again there was a slight pause for thought, and then Bala replied, 'About four months ago.' Had he seen any tiger after that? Certainly he had; twice. But they were ordinary tigers, not the slayer of his father. How did he know this? Well, for one thing, they were smaller and darker, and they had disappeared as soon as they had seen him.

Then Bala came out with the news I was hoping so much to hear. He thought the tiger was in the vicinity once again, for although he had not seen or heard him, he had discovered large pug-marks a short distance down the banks of the stream. Those large pug-marks had synchronised on previous occasions with the man-eater's visits. They had been present around the half-devoured remains of his father.

I got to my feet as I made known my wish to see these pug-marks for myself. Bala took the precaution of telling the womenfolk to keep inside the hut and barricade the door during his absence, and then led us back to the stream almost at the same point at which we had crossed it when coming. He turned, and began to lead us downstream. Some three furlongs away the stream broadened, though the water kept to the centre of the channel. Due to its broadening, however, there was a narrow stretch of sandbank on either side. This had been crossed by a tiger two nights previously, from east to west. The tiger's pug-marks were so large that they were clearly visible to me long before we reached them.

The spoor was that of a very large animal, undoubtedly male. As I stood looking down upon it, I decided that, even allowing for the exaggeration caused by the imprints spreading in the soft sand, the animal that had made them was exceptionally big.

We returned to the hut, where I suggested to Bala that he should take his family away to Gazulapalli village for the duration of my visit at least. This would leave him free to assist me with an easy mind. The thought of that old woman, the girl wife and her infant son, not to mention Bala himself, in that pitiful hut deep in the jungle, just awaiting the day when one of them would be taken by the man-eater,

was something dreadful even to think of. In these modern days of strife and warfare, it is commonplace to read accounts of valour on the battlefield for which men have been awarded medals, for which their praises are loudly sung. We have read, too, of the lonely death of spies and agents who have gone voluntarily into the jaws of death and have sacrificed their lives for their country before a firing-squad, to fill an unmarked grave, their praises unsung. Thrilling tales of bravery, no doubt, that liven the blood in our veins. But my blood that day tingled in humble and respectful admiration for this little aboriginal family that had so bravely but simply faced the long months in their lonely home with the killer literally at their very door—the killer that had already taken the life of the breadwinner and head of their home.

The Chenchus hesitated for quite a while, but when I pressed them further, with the strong backing of both Krishnappa and Ali Baig, they eventually consented. The two forest guards and I sat under a nearby tree and waited while they packed up their few miserable goods into three ragged bundles. Then Bala closed the thorn door of the hut behind him, and with each of them carrying a bundle as a head-load, the mother still suckling her child, we set off in single file for the village.

That night the stationmaster invited me to his quarters for dinner. He was a vegetarian, but his wife had put up a noble effort and prepared one of the most tasty vegetarian curries that has ever been my good fortune to taste. A large bowl of delicious curd was an outstanding item, the whole being followed by big mugs of coffee. We had decided to hold a 'conference' after dinner to determine my next line of action, and Mr Balasubramaniam, the stationmaster, suggested that we hold it on the station premises, as his presence was required there during the night when the mail train to Guntakal would pass through, and two or three goods trains as well. So we repaired to the station, where we seated ourselves upon a bench on the open platform, with the two forest guards and Bala squatting on the ground before us.

To my way of thinking, the best plan appeared to be to tie out a couple of live baits the next day, one at the spot where the tiger had threatened the guards, and the other beside the stream midway between Bala's hut and the sandbank where we had seen the pug-marks. Bala and Krishnappa would remain behind to watch them and report if they were killed, while I would take Ali Baig as interpreter and proceed up the line to make further enquiries at Basavapuram and Chelama. If either of the baits was killed, Mr Balasubramaniam was to receive the report and telegraph the news up the line to me at either Basavapuram or Chelama, wherever I might be camped.

Taking me to his office, the stationmaster called up his colleagues

at both those stations and asked for *khubbar* or information. They reported no fresh news of the man-eater's presence, but added that everybody was on the alert and not a soul would venture out during the night. The stationmaster at Chelama also added that the trolley had been brought back to his station and was at present lying on the platform there. He suggested that Balasubramaniam should send a telegram down the line to the P.W.I., whose headquarters were at Nandyal, asking that I should be permitted to use the trolley if I should require urgent transport between the stations. No sooner said than done, my friend Balasubramaniam put his suggestion into practice at once, by transmitting a service telegram to the P.W.I. at Nandyal for urgent delivery, asking for the required permission. I was gratified by the enthusiastic co-operation shown by these railway officers. Throughout this adventure they did everything they could. Leaving the stationmaster to his work for a short time, I took my three henchmen down to the village. Although it was late at night, we did not want any delays the next day, so went to the house of a cattle-owner, awoke him from his sleep, and explained that our mission was to buy two half-grown bulls to use as baits.

The purchase of animals for this purpose in the jungles around Bangalore and particularly in Mysore state is always most difficult and has to be conducted with the utmost tact, as cattle-owners there consider it an evil practice to tie out live baits to be killed by a tiger or a panther, even with the object of eliminating an animal that has taken toll of human life. The people are not interested in selling for this purpose, and to obtain their co-operation sometimes takes hours of persuasion. To approach an owner for such a sale at dead of night would usually have been a hopeless undertaking. But the people in this particular area appeared to take a very realistic view. No sooner did the herdsman know of my purpose than he readily acquiesced. He even became enthusiastic and invited me to make my own selection.

The cattle-kraal stood behind his house, and with the aid of my torch I chose two half-grown brown bulls. The owner sold them to me for thirty-five rupees each—less than three pounds in English currency. I paid him the money, thanked him for his assistance and asked him to allow the animals to be kept with his herd till morning, when my followers would call for them. To this he agreed at once.

We returned to the station to find a goods train had since drawn in and stood on the line. The Anglo-Indian driver was chatting to Balasubramaniam in the latter's office, a thermos flask of coffee in one hand, while he sipped from a mug in the other. Evidently the stationmaster had been talking to him about me, for at my approach he introduced himself as William Rodgers, offered me his mug of coffee and volunteered the information that only four nights ago he

had seen a tiger jump across the track about a mile down the line in the direction of Nandyal. I asked him if he had noticed anything remarkable about the tiger or its colouration. He reminded me that the headlight of his engine would not reveal such details at that distance, but that the tiger appeared to have been quite a large animal. He also told me that if I cared to shoot a good chital or sambar stag, or even wild pig, they were more plentiful in the vicinity of Diguvametta than around this station.

I thanked Mr. Rodgers for his information and told him I would consider shooting deer after disposing of the tiger. He shook hands with me, took the 'line-clear' token from the stationmaster, waved us goodbye and sauntered back to his engine. A minute later its shrill whistle broke the stillness, and with a loud puffing and clanking the goods train rumbled on, the red light at the rear being lost to sight as it passed around a curve. Once again the station was shrouded in stillness.

Just then the telegraphic reply from Nandyal arrived, conveying the P.W.I.'s agreement to the use of the trolley lying at Chelama station.

The stationmaster opened the waiting-room. I struck a match and lit the solitary oil-light that hung from the ceiling. Bala brought in my rifle, bedroll, water-bottles and tiffin-basket. There was no water in the bathroom, and it was far too late to ask Balasubramaniam to arrange for any to be brought to me. Nor was there any bed in the room, but only a table, two armless chairs, and an armchair with a large hole in its centre. Grateful that at least I had a roof over my head, I blew out the light and found my way to the armchair. Half my rear end sank through the hole in the cane bottom, but the other half managed to keep above. I removed my boots, lay back in the chair, cautiously raised my feet to place them upon the extended leg supports, and was asleep before I even knew it.

Another goods train rumbled through at about 4.30 a.m. After that I fell asleep again, but it seemed only a few minutes later that Bala came into the room and called to me softly. I awoke to see that it was daylight. I found out that Balasubramaniam had gone to his quarters to snatch a few hours of well-earned rest; so, while Bala got busy on my instructions to gather three stones at the end of the platform, find some sticks and light a fire to brew tea in my travelling-kettle, I got out my small folding Primus stove, lit it and fried some bacon. The tea-water had not yet come to the boil when I finished the bacon, so I sauntered down to the 'water-column' at the opposite end of the platform, which supplied water to such thirsty locomotives as required it. I carried my towel, toothbrush, toothpaste and soap and a change of clothes with me. Stacking these articles some distance from the

water-column, I removed all my clothes and knotted the towel around my waist. Then I got beneath the leather hose and with one hand turned the wheel that opened the valve and let the water into the column from the ten thousand gallon storage tank standing high on its four stone pillars nearby. The quantity of water that suddenly descended upon me was tremendous and almost knocked me off my feet. However, I enjoyed my bath, combining it with my morning toothbrushing routine. Although I generally do not bother to shave in the jungles, to keep clean and feel fresh is very necessary. I had no second towel to dry myself with, as the one around my waist was wet, but it was of no account, for the morning was far from cold. In a few minutes I was able to don dry clothes and go back to Bala, to find the kettle boiling merrily. The tea, bacon and remains of the *chappatis* I had brought from Bangalore, which had become bone dry by then, served as 'chotahazri', which is the white man's exalted name for breakfast in India. The Hindustani adjective 'chota' signifies 'small', while 'hazri' indicates 'a meal'.

By the time I had finished all this, the two forest guards had come back from the village where they had gone to spend the latter part of the night. The four of us then set out, after collecting the two young bulls I had purchased the night before, to tie them at the places we had already selected. If you remember, the first of these was to be where the two guards had seen the tiger that had adopted such a threatening attitude. This was a spot on a narrow fire-line within a mile of the village. Krishnappa lopped off a branch with his axe, cut off about three feet and sharpened one end of this. We selected a tree on which a *machan* could be conveniently tied, provided the tiger obliged us by killing this bait, drove the stake that Krishnappa had just made into the ground at a suitable spot some fifteen yards away, and tethered one of the brown bulls to it by its hind leg, using a coil of the stout cotton rope I had brought with me in my bedroll. Then we walked back to the station, crossed the lines and traversed the three miles to the stream near Bala's hut. No fresh tracks were evident, so we tied the second calf beneath another tree on the slope of the stream about fifty yards short of the sandbank on which the tiger had left his pug-marks.

We got back to the station shortly before noon, when the stationmaster started insisting I should have lunch with him again. So as not to wound his feelings I very politely declined, as I knew my presence in his house was irksome to him as a high-caste individual, although he tried very gallantly not to show it. Instead, I went to the village with the guards and managed to obtain a meal of sorts from the village 'hotel'—a one-roomed zincsheet-cum-grass-roofed affair. That done, we all returned to the station, where I gave instructions to

the two Chenchus who were to feed and water the baits: they were to tell the stationmaster if either was killed. Mr Balasubramaniam needed no reminding of the part he was to play in the affair by sending a message to me should such a kill occur.

Let me here record my appreciation of this gentleman's co-operation. I knew it was violently against his religious principles to aid and abet me, or to assist me in any way by bringing about the death of a bull or cow, which to his caste are sacred animals. But in the larger interests that were at stake, he suborned his principles and went all-out in his efforts to help me.

The train that was to carry me to the next station, Basavapuram, six miles away, steamed in at 2.30 p.m. I asked the driver for permission to travel with him on the engine, which he very readily gave. I wanted to do this so as to view the jungle on both sides of the track. Ali Baig got into the first third-class compartment behind, and away we went.

The train took twenty-five minutes to cover those six miles. As I viewed the thick jungle through which we passed, my hopes of success sank very very low indeed. It was an immense area, heavily forested, and the tiger might be anywhere.

The railway station at Basavapuram closely resembled Gazulapalli. As I got off and thanked the driver, I began to think I had indeed been a super-optimist in tying those two baits at Gazulapalli while the tiger might be here at Basavapuram, or even at the next station, Chelama, five miles further on.

The stationmaster here turned out to be as obliging as had been his counterpart. He was a non-caste Tamil named Masilamony, and after his first words of greeting, in which he made me feel quite at home, he urged me to make my headquarters in his waiting room, stating that the tiger would surely be found there in Basavapuram, being the centre of the affected district.

Once again I went through my routine of closely questioning the station staff, and the one forest guard who came from the village. He was a Telugu and told me, through Masilamony, that the other forest guard who shared with him the responsibility of looking after the area was suffering severely from malaria and had gone on sick leave to Nandyal. They had all seen tigers at various times, and each claimed that he had seen the man-eater. But nobody appeared to have noticed anything special about it, either in size or markings. This forest guard, whose name was Kittu, told me there was a water hole north of the railway line and a little over a mile away, where he had often seen tiger pug-marks when these animals came to drink water.

We walked to the water hole that evening, where I noticed some old pug-marks of a tiger, together with a recent spoor made by a large

panther. I was annoyed to see the latter, as I was almost certain he would devour any bait I tied there long before the tiger showed up. It is a nuisance to bait for a tiger at a spot frequented by a panther, as one is almost sure to sacrifice the bait to the latter.

I spent the night in the waiting-room and bought a half-grown buffalo calf in the village next morning. This we tied in a clearing in the jungle half a mile short of the water hole, and I instructed Kittu to visit it each morning in company with his friends, to feed and water it, and to tell the stationmaster if it was killed. Masilamony readily agreed to follow Balasubramaniam's example and send me a message as soon as word was brought to him.

Once again I caught the afternoon train, which came a little late at 3.15 p.m., and travelled on the engine up the line for five miles to Chelama. The engine-driver, who was an Indian, as we passed through it, pointed out the cutting where the trolley-man had been taken. He said it was almost midway between the two stations.

We alighted at Chelama to follow much the same procedure. The stationmaster came up and greeted me, saying he had been told to expect my arrival by his colleagues in the stations I had recently left. He had also arranged with the two local forest guards to await me; they were, in fact, on the platform.

As a result of the conference that followed, I was told that word had been brought by the guard of a goods train which had passed through Basavapuram while I had been sleeping in the waiting room there that morning, that a woman had been killed at Diguvametta, sixteen miles further up, at the extreme eastern limit of the jungle belt. The guard had been unable to mention the matter to any of us at Basavapuram, as his train passed the station without stopping.

This latest news upset all my calculations, just as it dashed my hopes to zero. Not only did it increase enormously the area of search for the man-eater, but all my carefully cherished tiger-beat timetable was entirely upset. I had been almost sure that the man-eater would be somewhere in the vicinity of Gazulapalli. Instead, he had killed at Diguvametta, which was twenty-seven miles away.

Then I remembered that twenty-seven miles was, after all, no long walk for a tiger.

I asked the stationmaster to verify the news if possible on the morse-line to Diguvametta. After about fifteen minutes of tapping on the telegraph key, he said that the stationmaster at Diguvametta had confirmed it with the local policeman at his village, to whom a report had been made that a Chenchu woman, gathering *mhowa* flowers at the edge of the jungle, had disappeared the morning of the day before. People from her village had found her half-filled basket, but no traces of her. The Diguvametta stationmaster also sent his advice that, as he

had heard I was tying up live baits at the different stations, I should on no account fail to do so at Diguvametta, and also at the small station of Bogada which lay between Chelama and Diguvametta.

Here indeed was a pretty kettle of fish. It seemed as if I would have to tie up baits at each station along this whole line to catch up with the elusive tiger.

It would not be very interesting to give you the details of how I tied up a bait at Chelama next morning. Perhaps you may wonder why I did not leave for Diguvametta by the next train, but you must not forget that two days had passed since the woman had been killed, and the tiger would have picked her bones clean by the time I arrived—assuming, of course, that I was able to find them. So I thought it better to finish tying the bait intended for Chelama before moving on.

But that same afternoon I caught the train to Bogada, where I tied another bait in the evening, catching a goods train for Diguvametta in the early hours of the morning. There I tied two animals, one near the place where the woman had been taken, and the other at a point where a forest-line, a large stream and a cattle-track leading into the jungle intersected. Diguvametta boasted of a forester, an intelligent and very helpful Indian Christian. This man assured me that many tigers had been shot in years gone by from *machans* in the branches of the 'hongee' tree which grew at the spot where the latter bait was tied.

I had now spent some five days in this area, had seven baits tied out, had used up far more money than I wanted or expected to use, and was quite tired of only hearing stories about this elusive tiger without even hearing him roar—or any tiger, for that matter. The jungles had been exceptionally silent since my arrival.

During the evening of the day on which I tied the two baits at Diguvametta, I went for an extensive ramble into the forest, accompanied by Joseph, the Indian Christian forester. As he was a non-vegetarian like myself, and a bachelor withal, at his invitation and assurance that my presence would cause him no discomfort or inconvenience, I decided to remain at least a few days at Diguvametta and sleep on the verandah of his quarters. The stationmaster had previously offered the use of the station waiting room, but the passing trains at night disturbed me. Joseph's Malayali servant whom he had brought along with him from Calicut, who cooked his food and attended to his few requirements, would relieve me of the burden and waste of time each day that I had hitherto been compelled to spend in preparing some of my own meals, snatched and scanty as they had had to be.

Another reason for choosing Diguvametta as my camping-place, at least for the present, was of course the fact that it was here that the tiger had last killed, just over three days previously. You may wonder

again why we had made no very serious attempt to locate the remains of the poor woman who had been taken. Firstly, it would have served no purpose. As I have already indicated, the tiger had had more than sufficient time to devour her completely, and at most we might have found but a few gnawed bones. Secondly, the jungle was intensely dry, and although I had cast about at the time of tying up my live-bait (a bull-calf), there had been no clue as to the direction in which the tiger had carried her. We had combed the area in a radius of well over two hundred yards and found nothing, not even a remnant of torn cloth from her garment. Lastly, there being no purpose as I have just said in finding her remains at such a late state, I did not want to disturb the area further, for it had already been disturbed by the party of men who had come searching for the girl and found her basket.

The jungle in the locality was beautiful and indeed a sportsman's paradise as regards feathered game and deer. We came upon several herds of graceful cheetal in the forest glades. The long spear-grass was bone-dry, and the ends of the stems bent down to earth with the weight of the barb-like dry seeds with which they were tufted. This factor greatly increased the range of visibility and enabled us to see between the stems of the trees and into the glades. We even came upon a lordly sambar stag with a beautiful pair of antlers, which crashed away at our approach. It had been a bit early in the evening for a sambar to be about. Nevertheless the presence of the stag advertised the fact that the jungle was undisturbed, but that natural game was so abundant suggested little hope or reason for the tiger to take either of my baits. By the very same token, with such abundance of food available just for the taking, there seemed no cause for the tiger ever to have turned man-eater at all.

I purchased Ali Baig's ticket, instructing him to return by the night mail to Gazulapalli, as his presence was no longer necessary, and made an early night of it myself. At least in Joseph's verandah I was not disturbed by the clanking of trains, so that I slept soundly for ten hours and awoke the next morning in a considerably more hopeful frame of mind. The Malayali servant had performed wonders while we had been sleeping. There was a jug of strong tea and plateful of 'hoppers' and 'puttoo-rice'. The former is made from finely-ground rice-flour, and the latter from the whole grains of a special variety of rice. They are specialities of Madras, and their presence before me that morning indicated that my newfound friend and host Joseph, undoubtedly came from that city. It proved a delicious and most welcome repast.

Then I had a cold bath inside the enclosure constructed for the purpose, built up against the wall of the house, its three sides consisting of bamboo mats, each about five feet wide. There was no

roof.

Joseph was ready and waiting while I dressed. We then visited the two baits we had tied out the day before, in company with both the forest guards who worked under Joseph, and to whom he had delegated the responsibility of feeding and watering these animals. Both the baits were alive and untouched.

There was nothing more I could do but await developments. The area was far too extensive to warrant long walks in the jungle in the hope of stumbling upon the tiger by accident. It might be anywhere between Diguvametta and Gazulapalli, twenty-seven miles away, and searching for it would have been a waste of time and energy. Up to this stage, as I have already said I had not contacted any tiger whatever, but I had done some yeoman spadework, and I might expect to reap the rewards in a little while.

And once started, things really did begin to happen. The telegraph wires hummed at about nine the next morning when Masilamony, the stationmaster at Basavapuram, relayed the news that my bait had been killed the night before. I was not over-exuberant at receiving this information, for you may remember that this was the place where I had come across fresh panther-tracks near the water hole, and had deliberately tied my bait some distance away to keep it from that panther, if possible.

I asked the stationmaster at Diguvametta to speak to Masilamony and ask him to question the forest guard, Kittu, closely to find out whether it was a tiger that had taken my bait or the panther. There was only a short delay before the reply came back; Masilamony explained that Kittu was beside him at the telegraph instrument while he was signalling. Kittu stated the bait had been killed by a panther and advised that I should come and shoot it, as otherwise any other baits I might tie up would undoubtedly suffer the same fate at the hands of this animal.

This was sound logic. At the same time, I did not possess a regular game licence for the area, but had come on a special request to shoot the man-eater only, and nothing else, made directly by the Chief Conservator of Forests at Madras, who had issued a permit to cover my visit. I decided I would write to the Chief Conservator later and explain the reason why I had to eliminate the panther, while offering to pay the game licence fee should any objection arise. I therefore made up my mind to answer Masilamony's summons.

There was no passenger train in the direction of Basavapuram during the day, but fortunately a goods train was scheduled to pass through at about eleven that very morning. The stationmaster stopped the train for me, and I travelled in the guard's van to Basavapuram. Joseph insisted on going with me.

Kittu took me to the kill, which bore every trace of a panther's handiwork, from the fang-marks in its throat to the large hole that had been eaten in the animal's stomach, where entrails and flesh had all become mixed up together to form a repast. The panther had eaten heavily the night before, and because of that I feared it might make a late return. Kittu offered me the loan of his own *charpoy* or rope-cot, so, rather than build a *machan*, we went back for it. To return and tie it up took scarcely two hours, and everything was set by four o'clock.

It was far too early to sit up, so we returned to the station, hardly more than a mile away, and had a quick meal, consisting of biscuits, *chappatties*, bananas and several mugs of tea. Joseph expressed a keen desire to sit up with me, so we both returned and were in position in the *machan* by 5.30 p.m.

I have said that I expected the panther to come late. I was wrong. We had been in the *machan* for scarcely twenty minutes, and I was leaning back and taking it easy, when I heard a faint sound below me. I looked down. There was the panther sitting on his haunches beside his kill and contemplating it. A truly nice specimen, I was tempted to spare his life. This temptation I overcame only because his presence there would be a constant source of interference with my baits. I shot him behind the left shoulder.

Our early return to the station surprised both Kittu and Masilamony. Hearing the news, the latter asked me to give him the skin if I was not in need of it, to which I agreed, and we went back with a petromax light and four coolies to retrieve the dead panther. I supervised while Masilamony excitedly watched the skinning operation. I showed him how to preserve the pelt temporarily with a solution of copper-sulphate and salt till such time as he could send it to a taxidermist at Bangalore.

Next morning I bought another bait to replace the one that had been killed. We took this to the water hole where I had seen the old tiger pug-marks and there we tied it up.

It had been my intention after shooting the panther to return with Joseph to Diguvametta by the afternoon train, but when we got back to Basavapuram station after tying out the new bait, Masilamony informed me that I had just received a morse message from the stationmaster at Chelama, stating my bait there had been taken the previous night by a tiger.

This information came before ten o'clock. The train to Chelama would not arrive for at least another four hours. So I decided to walk the five miles to Chelama, to which Joseph at once agreed. We were there shortly after 11.30 p.m.

The stationmaster who had relayed the message, and the two forest guards who had brought it, were awaiting our arrival. They

were all in a state of excitement, and the guards reported that when they had gone to inspect and water the bait that morning they had come upon its partially-devoured remains and the pug-marks of a large tiger in the surrounding earth. Delaying only long enough to cut some branches and place them across the carcass of the dead animal to hide it from vultures, they had hurried back to the station to send their message.

Now in all seven cases, when tying up these baits, I had chosen each spot very carefully and had taken care to place each animal close to a tree on which it would be convenient to tie a *machan*. This precaution had already made my task easy when shooting the panther.

The forest guards volunteered to get a *charpoy* for me, while Joseph and I, together with the stationmaster, went down to the only eating-house in the village for our midday meal. During this meal Joseph said he would like to sit up with me again, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I could dissuade him without wounding his feelings. His company was one thing where the panther was concerned, but quite another when it came to a tiger, especially so if the animal happened to be the man-eater for which we were all searching. The slightest sound or incautious movement by a person in a *machan* would betray our presence and drive the animal away. I had previously had experience of companions who had sat in *machans* with me and made involuntary sounds which had rendered our vigil abortive. This is especially likely to happen if the sitting-up becomes a nightlong affair and the person gets fidgety and restless. I did not want to run this risk after all the trouble I had taken in tying up my baits over such a wide area.

The kill was about an hour's walk from the station and perhaps three miles inside the jungle, and was reached by traversing a tortuous footpath and then making a short cut downhill. I had the *charpoy* in position long before 3.30 p.m., but as the leaves to screen it had to be brought from some distance away, so as not to disturb the neighbourhood, and moreover had to be of the same species as the tree in which the *charpoy* had been fixed (in this instance a tamarind), it was nearly an hour more before I was in position.

While the two guards had been busy fixing the *machan*, assisted by Joseph, who passed the branches up to them from the ground, I studied the kill and the half-dozen or so pugmarks that the tiger had left. The earth was fairly hard, so that the marks were only partially visible, and in every instance the ball of the pad was not clearly outlined. I could see the tiger was a large one and a male, but it was quite impossible to say with any degree of certainty that he was the same animal whose footprints I had seen beside the stream near Bala's hut in Gazulapalli. There the marks had been made in the soft, damp

sand which had served to spread and to some extent exaggerate their size. But here the ground was dry and fairly hard.

Just before 4.30 p.m. I was comfortably settled on the *charpoy*. I spent a few minutes arranging my tea-filled water-bottle beside the smaller one that contained water. The village 'hotel' had supplied three large *chappattis*, folded inside a portion of banana-leaf, for dinner. These I placed next to the bottles holding the liquid refreshments; then came my spare torch and cartridges. The nights at this time of the year were warm, so I had brought no blanket or overcoat; only my balaclava cap, which I donned. Finally I fixed my torch into its clamps along the rifle, and then all was ready.

I told Joseph and the guards that I could find my way back to the station on my own. They walked away, leaving me to start my vigil.

It was just getting dark when I became aware of a muffled tread on the grass directly beneath me. The leaves of the tamarind tree are tiny and soft, so that when they become dry and fall to earth they form a malleable carpet and emit no sound when trodden upon, beyond the vaguest rustling noises, hard to recognize or define. In this respect the dried leaves of teak trees provide the ideal medium to warn the watcher of the approach of any living thing, even a rat, for they rustle and crackle long before the intruder appears in sight. But I knew that those muffled sounds heralded the coming of the tiger, and so it was that I was not surprised when, leaning forward and looking down, I saw him almost immediately beneath me. The weight of his body on the grass and tiny fallen tamarind leaves had caused the slight sound that had betrayed his approach.

He then passed out of view for a few seconds, but reappeared soon and strode boldly towards the bull he had killed. This was in a direction away from me, so that I could not make out much of his head, but saw his left flank, hindquarters and tail instead. As I have said, it was just about getting dark. In the forests, at such a time, colours tend to lose their clarity and objects look much bigger than they really are. Anyone who has been in a jungle or even in the English woods at dusk, will tell you the same thing. The animal below me appeared abnormally large, but I could not make out whether his colour was pale or otherwise. The stripes were blurred and hardly visible.

It was too dark to take the shot without the aid of the torch, especially as I would not be able to see the foresight of my rifle clearly. So I pressed the switch with my left thumb. The beam shone forth, lighting up the left side of the tiger, and fell ahead of him on to the kill. As I aimed quickly, I remember noticing that the tiger was not aware of the fact that the light was coming from behind him. Rather, he seemed to think it was coming from the kill itself. He just stood

still and looked.

I fired behind the left shoulder. He fell forward against the dead bull and then squirmed around on his right side. The white of his belly and chest came into view. I fired again. The tiger died as I continued to shine my torch on him.

I waited for perhaps twenty minutes, during which time I flashed my light now and again to make sure I had indeed killed him. Then I climbed down and made a close examination of my prize.

He was a large male in his prime, but he was certainly not the same animal that Bala had described to me. This one had a rich dark coat, and his stripes were very far from being abnormally narrow. Had I shot the wrong tiger, or was this the real man-eater? Was the animal that Bala had seen some other ordinary, oldish, tiger? These questions sprang to mind, but I knew that the answer would only be known if another human was killed—or if there were no more human victims.

By the aid of my flashlight I was able to find the winding track that eventually brought me to the railway station a little before 9 p.m. Joseph was asleep in the waiting room, while the two guards lay on a mat on the platform. I awoke them and announced what had taken place. Their surprise at my early return gave place to great jubilation at news of my success, and Joseph shook hands with me in warm congratulation.

I thanked him, but said I was far from certain that I had killed the man-eater. He asked why, and I told him. But he and the guards were optimistic and said they were sure I had slain the right tiger.

The stationmaster then arrived to supervise the passing of the night trains, and he too was very pleased to hear the news. The two guards hurried off to summon a carrying party, returning in another hour or so with some ten men, a couple of stout bamboos, ropes and two lanterns.

We returned to the kill and were back with the tiger by 1 a.m. I had the carcass placed at the end of the platform, just outside the iron railings that marked the precincts of the station yard, and started to skin the animal with the aid of the two lanterns and my spare torch, held by Joseph. I did the job myself as the guards appeared not to know much about the art, and I was closely engrossed and halfway through the operation when the night mail train, going down the line to Guntakal, came to a halt at the station.

Everybody in that train got down, from driver to guard and including all the passengers, and stood around me in an enormous circle to get a clear view. I got much publicity that night and the train left more than fifteen minutes behind schedule. The running staff regarded the delay as of little consequence. Besides, the skin being taken off a large tiger at dead of night on a railway station platform is

not exactly a common sight, even in India.

The standard application of a solution of copper sulphate and salt would temporarily preserve it for the duration of my trip.

The next day I rested, while the stationmaster relayed the news to the stations on both sides of Chelama, and everybody was happy. I was not so pleased myself, and decided to remain for a further week if possible. As I had tied out my baits and come prepared to stay up to a month if needed, I felt it would be better to remain where I was rather than return to Bangalore and then have to come out again and tie out my baits once more. For a strange premonition kept insisting to me that the man-eater was not dead and would kill someone very soon.

Four days passed. Then came the news from Gazulapalli that the tiger had killed Bala's young wife. Unknown to me he had taken his family back to his hut in the forest, thinking that the coast was clear.

The man-eater had kept to his expected schedule after all.

Joseph had meanwhile returned to Diguvametta, so I waited only long enough to send a message to Balasubramaniam to keep Bala in attendance and, borrowing the trolley at Chelama, as no goods train was due to pass for the next four hours, set out for Gazulapalli, propelled by two trolleymen.

We took a little over an hour and a half to get there and found Bala awaiting me, seated on the ground at a corner of the platform, weeping. Balasubramaniam was there, too, and the two forest guards, Ali Baig and Krishnappa.

The young Chenchu's tale was as brief as it was tragic. Hearing I had shot the man-eater at Chelama, and as neither of my live baits had been touched all this time, he had decided that the danger to their lives had passed and had taken his family back to their hut only two days earlier. At dawn that very morning his wife had wakened, laid their baby next to him, and had gone outside to relieve herself. A moment later he heard her cry out faintly. Realising that something terrible had happened, he had seized his axe and rushed outside. There was nothing to be seen.

It was not yet daylight, and Bala said that he could find no trace of anything having happened, except that his young wife was not there. He had called to her but received no answer. Frantically searching, he went to the other side of the hut where he knew she would have gone for the purpose she had had in mind. Still he found nothing.

The grass was wet after a heavy night's dew-fall, and as the light grew stronger he was able to pick out the course made by something that had walked away through it into the jungle.

He had found no blood trail, but he knew he was gazing at the *path* made in the wet grass as the man-eater had walked through it, carrying his wife. For the trail through the damp grass was clear,

where it had been trodden upon or brushed aside by the passage of the two heavy bodies—the tiger and his victim.

Then Bala had done a very brave and a very foolish thing. Alone, and armed only with his puny axe, he had followed the trail.

With more daylight, after a couple of furlongs, he had come upon the first trace of a blood trail from the point where the tiger had laid his burden down among the dew-dripping bushes in order to change his grip on his victim. Thereafter, following the grim trail had been easy, and he had caught up with the tiger in the act of settling down to its meal at the foot of an old dead tree.

The man-eater had seen him. He laid back his ears and growled. In another second he would have charged. But the sight of his wife being devoured before his very eyes had proved too much for the young Chenchu. Some demon of recklessness and bravery had possessed him, and, burning with hate and screaming, he rushed upon the tiger brandishing his little axe.

I have often told you that all man-eaters appear to be possessed by a strange streak of cowardice. They will attack a victim unawares but will rarely face up to a direct counterattack. That early morning the man-eater of Chelama proved himself no exception to the rule. He hesitated till the little Chenchu was almost upon him. Then he turned tail and fled.

Fortunately, wisdom at last came to Bala. Had he attempted to follow the tiger, the latter might well have recovered his morale and wiped him out. Instead, he snatched up the corpse of his wife and ran back with it to the hut.

Hearing this simple tale, simply told by the little aborigine, my heart was filled with admiration and pride that India possessed such heroes, even among her most humble out-caste tribes.

At the hut Bala had wasted no time on tears. Leaving the body inside, and bidding his old mother carry the child, he had secured the door as best he could and set off for the railway station to get word to me. It was lucky that he had acted so quickly, for he and his mother were well on their way to the station before the tiger had time to recover from his fright and return to the body or the hut.

The little man was crying silently as he told me this story, and I made no effort to console him. His tears would be good for him. They were Mother Nature's own salve to the great nervous strain he had been through and an outlet for his pent-up emotions after the shock of bereavement. My lip-sympathy, on the other hand, would be quite useless. I could never even hope to look for an excuse to bridge the tragic gap that had been created in his young life, so early that very morning.

But the tears did not last for long. The aboriginal is inherently a

fatalist. I did not want to interrupt or hurry him, but ten minutes later Bala stood up and announced himself ready for action.

I had been thinking quickly and deeply, and a plan was forming in my mind. To put it into effect would require the utmost sacrifice from Bala, and I hesitated to ask him to make it. Perhaps some affinity of thought between us, born of years of life in the jungle, he by birth and me by choice, bound us together. He looked up into my face, and once again tears welled from his eyes as he gently nodded his head. Then Ali Baig interpreted. 'She was my wife and I love her, *dorai*. But you shall have her dead body to serve as bait to avenge the death of this dear one, and of my father.'

Enough words had been spoken, and enough time wasted. I was determined to play my part in the role with which this humble but great little man had entrusted me. I waited only to eat a hurried meal of vegetable curry and rice which the ever-solicitous Balasubramaniam had got his wife to prepare for me, filled my two water-bottles with tea and water respectively, and set off for the hut with the two forest guards and Bala, carrying a *charpoy*.

The dead girl was a pitiful sight. The few rags she had been wearing had been torn away by the tiger, but Bala had covered her loins with the one saree she had possessed. The young face wore a strange expression of calm. Blood had seeped into the mud floor of the hut from her lacerated back, and its dark stream had trickled from her torn throat and breasts and dried on her dusky skin. We stood, all four of us, in respectful silence for a minute, regarding those mangled remains on the floor before us that had, only that morning, been a living and happy mother. Then I closed the door of the hut behind us as I motioned Bala to lead us to the spot where he had found the tiger about to begin his meal.

The sun had long since absorbed the dew, and the heads of spear grass that had bent with the passage of the man-eater and his victim were standing upright again, gently nodding in the light breeze. Bala walked ahead to the spot where the tiger had laid the girl down for the first time and changed his hold. From there the blood-spoor began and it led us in a short time to an old dead tree, at the foot of which the killer had set her down to begin his meal in real earnest, when Bala had driven him off.

We walked silently and did not speak, although all four of us were on the alert. But there was little actual danger, because of our numbers. At the foot of the tree we halted and looked at the ground. It was hard and covered with short dried grass. No pug-marks were visible, nor was there any need to look for them

I remembered that this tiger was accredited with never returning to his meal of a human victim after his earlier experience in

Hyderabad when he was wounded by the Nawab. Would he return now? Would there be any use in my sitting up for him? These thoughts passed dismally through my mind. The only ray of hope in this case was the fact that he had not eaten even a mouthful of the girl. But against that was the fact that Bala had frightened him away. All said and done, the proposition appeared to hold out but little chance of success. But I knew I would have to try, for there was no alternative.

I looked around for a tree on which to put the *charpoy*.

The tiger had selected a densely-wooded spot for his repast, covered with bushes and undergrowth. The nearest tree, other than the bare dead one, was thirty yards away. When I squatted on my haunches at the approximate height of a tiger, I could see I would have to sit right at the top to see over the undergrowth and have a fair chance to shoot. Most probably the tiger would only return after dark, if he returned at all, and a flashlight could not penetrate the brambles should I sit any lower down.

I walked the thirty yards to the tree and looked up. Its higher branches were no thicker than my two fingers and could not possibly support my weight in the *charpoy*.

The next sizeable tree was some ten yards further away. I got to it and scrambled up. But I could only see the upper portion of the trunk of the dead tree where the tiger had been. The brambles hid its base and everything else below.

Here was a knotty problem. Where could I sit?

I walked back to the three men and sauntered around the dead tree. It had been a big tree in its day and the bole at its base was twelve to fifteen feet in circumference. There was no apparent reason why it had died: perhaps from some disease or an insect pest. Perhaps its roots had been eaten away underground. Whatever the cause, it had perished some years earlier; only the dead branches forked into the cloudless sky above my head.

White ants had already begun their work of demolition from below, and in a short while the weakened base would no longer be able to sustain the weight of the dead superstructure, and the whole would crash to earth and disintegrate as food for the termites and the myriad wood-beetles and insects of all kinds that would then attack it from the ground.

I walked closer to the trunk. At a spot just level with the top of my head three branches had spread out from the main stem. A crust of dried earth covered the busy white ants below. Raising Myself on tiptoe, I peered into the cavity that led down the stem. The inside of the tree was hollow.

This had not been noticeable from outside, particularly from the

spot where the victim's body had been laid.

I motioned to the three men and whispered to Ali Baig to ask Bala to get inside the hollow trunk to see whether a place could be made for me there. Before sending him, however, I took the precaution to shine my spare flashlight into the hole, to make sure it did not shelter a snake or scorpion, or even a centipede. Having made certain it was tenantless except for the white ants, Bala nimbly let himself down. Being at least a foot shorter than me, he disappeared from view, but popped out again and stated that it was a close fit for him and could not possibly accommodate my greater bulk. Some extension of the interior was absolutely necessary.

I then noticed that the white ants had eaten much further into the wood on the opposite side.

With Bala pushing from within, and we three pulling from outside with our hands, aided now and again by a couple of gentle blows from Krishnappa's axe, we started tearing away the rotting wood from the hole by which Bala had entered. The termites had already done most of the work for us, and little by little we enlarged the hole, working downwards towards ground level. We increased the size of the entrance not only at the top, but by dint of removing the wood from the other side of the bole we completely exposed that side down to about knee-level. As the wood came away, to lay open the interior, we were able to get our hands inside and use Bala's short-handled axe as well.

It was hard work and took nearly two hours, but at last I was able to step into a hole that was sufficiently big to accommodate my feet up to my knees. Thereafter, I was free enough to move my hands and my rifle through the opening we had made in the off-side of the trunk.

There were several serious snags in my position. The main one was that I had my back to the point where the tiger had set the woman down, and to which he would most probably return—that is, if he did return. I could not turn and look in that direction because the tree trunk was behind me. Further, we had not been able to remove the wood from this part of the trunk, as the white ants had eaten more on the opposite side, as I have said. To do so we would have had to hack through the wood, for which we did not have the time, apart from the noise we would make.

All these drawbacks combined to suggest that, when we finally put the corpse of the girl-wife into place, it could not be at the spot where the tiger had left it. We would be compelled to change its position a little. If I did not do that and the tiger did come, he would either remove the carcass before I became aware of his presence, or he would sit and eat it within a distance of five yards from me without my being able to do anything about it. Of course, I could step out of

cover and creep around the bole of the tree. But I was far too afraid to do that. Further, I would probably make some noise in stepping out of the trunk in the dark. The tiger would hear me and perhaps disappear; or, what was more frightening, he might meet me halfway around the trunk. That thought was difficult to relish.

A second major disadvantage lay in the fact that I would have to stand upright throughout the night. I could not even squat, because the hole below knee-level was just large enough for my legs.

Thirdly, if the tiger reconnoitered the place before approaching the body, as every sensible tiger would do, he would look straight at me as soon as he came opposite the gap we had cut. Of course, I would have the men put up some sort of camouflage to hide in, in the way of leaves and trailing creepers, but would I be able to deceive his jungle-bred eyes if he looked straight in my direction? At least, would he not become suspicious of these leaves and other things, suddenly appearing on the bole of a tree that had been quite bare only that very morning?

Again, if a cobra, scorpion or some other nasty creeping or crawling thing chose to select the hollow in the dead tree to keep itself warm on a chilly night, I would indeed be in a sorry predicament. There were so many possibilities of trouble that I shrugged them away. I would have to take the chance, although the odds seemed to be ten to one against success.

I laid my coat upon the ground, and on it we piled every bit of the dried wood we had removed, even to the last scrap. We then held the coat at the four corners and carried it away to throw the debris at a distance.

Then we returned to the hut, where Bala bravely lifted his wife's body on his shoulder. In single file and silence we walked back to the tree. I asked him to set the body down a little to the left of the opening we had made, so that the tiger in looking at it would not be in a direct line with the opening and myself. There was no room for anything inside the hollow but myself and the rifle with torch attached, so I swallowed a chappatti and some tea from my water-bottle before giving it to Ali Baig to take back.

I stepped into the hollow. Bala and Krishnappa then placed some sticks across the opening, between which they draped leaves and trails of creepers to screen me as much as possible. This job Bala took very seriously, going back some paces to different angles of vision every now and again, to check whether I could still be seen inside. He wedged a larger bit of stick across the two sides of the opening at the level of my chest, so that I might rest my rifle upon it as I fired. I found I could slide my rifle before me, slowly up my body and then over this stick without making any noise. The two Chenchus draped

the stick and the trunk on both sides of my face with creepers, hanging them downwards against the wood from the two higher branches of the tree. Finally, they wedged a great mass of leaves and wood down on the base of the three branches that bifurcated above me. I was truly bottled up inside that hollow.

Before leaving, Bala bade farewell to his dead wife. He kissed the cold forehead and he kissed her feet. Then he got down on his knees beside the body and prostrated himself on the ground, with his palms extended to earth, to seek her pardon for the indignities to which he was exposing her poor body.

When he got up again, there were no tears in his eyes. His face was resolute. He looked at me wordlessly. Once more the telepathy of jungle-loving people passed between us. His look said, far more clearly than any spoken word: 'I have done all I could and have even sacrificed the body of my dear one. The rest is up to you.' I resolved I would not fail him.

A moment later my three followers had gone on their way to the hut and I was alone.

I glanced at my wristwatch. The time was 4.45 p.m. Patches of bright sunlight filtered through the undergrowth and dappled the red and black of the dead woman's saree which Bala had wrapped around her waist. Her hair had fallen loosely and lay outspread on the ground, framing the head and face, now turned towards me, with its peaceful expression. Rigor mortis had set in and one hand lay folded stiffly across her breast, where perhaps her husband had laid it in the morning when he had carried her body back to their hut. The other had set by her side. The gentle evening breeze, swaying the grass, idly flapped a corner of the saree or lifted a wisp of her jet-black hair.

Except for the breeze stirring the leaves and grass, nothing else moved. Except for the faint tick of my wristwatch, and a dull thudding sound which took me quite some time to identify as the pounding of my own heart, I could hear no other sound.

I spread my feet gently, inch by inch, and eased them as far forward as possible while leaning back. They would have to bear my weight that whole night, and my least duty to them was to try to distribute that load as evenly as possible.

The jungle came to life forty-five minutes later, with the usual cries of roosting peafowl and jungle fowl. One grey cock strutted out into the clearing before me, and crowed his challenge to the dying day. 'Kuck ky'a ky'a khuk'm', he called, and in a few seconds the cry was answered by another junglecock in the distance. 'Wheew, kuck khuke'm', he replied. The first rooster ruffled his feathers and looked in the direction from which the reply had come. Then a gust of wind blew and the corner of the saree stirred. With a heavy flapping of

wings, the rooster was gone.

'Mi-iao mi-iao' called a peacock, to be answered by similar cries from his own kind, as the heavy birds flapped one by one to rest in groups in some distant tree. Spurfowl cackled their fighting notes in the undergrowth, while the last of the *butterflies* and beetles sailed or buzzed their homeward way to the particular leaf or other shelter they had chosen for that night.

The daylight faded fast in the manner of all tropical countries. My feathered friends of the sunny hours were no doubt tucking their heads beneath their wings, or at least would do so very soon. With the fading light, something soft descended from the skies and came to rest on the ground a yard away. It was a nightjar, the harbinger of the Indian jungle night. 'Chuck-chuck-chuckoooo', it trilled, while its brown outline on the dried grass resembled just a stone. And then, with a graceful outstretching of its wings, it floated away. 'Cheep-cheep-cheep' came a sound from directly above me. Two bats circled their rapid flight around the tree, to snap up the belated day-insects that were just going to rest, in addition to some early arrivals from among the insects of the night.

I had seen and heard it all so very many times before; the diminuendo of the creatures of the day giving place to the crescendo of the creatures of the night. But never in quite the same position and circumstances as I was now in, I had to admit.

Then came darkness for a short while—but not for long, as singly and in groups the stars began to twinkle overhead, shedding a very diffused light on the jungle around me. That would be my only illumination till daylight came again, for this had happened during the moonless nights.

The mosquitoes took some time to find me out, but when their scouts finally made the discovery, they lost but few moments in reporting to headquarters. Then whole squadrons of dive-bombers made full capital out of it. With protruding under-lip, I blew them off my face and I stuffed my hands into my trouser pockets to outwit such of the more enterprising individuals as had flown inside my tree-trunk, bent upon sucking my blood.

Eight o'clock came. I lifted one foot after the other and wriggled my toes inside my canvas shoes in order to restore circulation to the soles of my feet. This tiger had the reputation of never returning to a human kill. And I had placed myself in this awkward and uncomfortable position for the night. Then a picture of Bala's tear-stained face and of that dead countenance, now lying out in the darkness so close to me but hidden from sight, appeared before my mind, and my reason assured me that what I was doing at that moment was the only thing possible for me to do.

My thoughts had been wandering when all of a sudden I became fully alert, every nerve at high tension. I had seen nothing; I had heard not a sound. But just as certain as I was of my own name, I knew the man-eater was near. The hair on my neck was on end and a faint nervous quiver ran through my whole being. Some undefined and indefinable sense had screamed the warning to me. Yes, without doubt, the tiger was there.

I strained my ears to the utmost to hear any sound. There was absolute silence. No warning cry from deer or other jungle creatures had betrayed the feline's movements.

Such complete silence and such delay in approaching the dead body meant only one thing. The tiger was suspicious. Was that the aftermath of the fright Bala had given him that morning, or had he seen or sensed something in his surroundings. Above all, had he seen or sensed me?

I would have given a great deal to know the answer to the last question.

After what appeared to be an eternity, I heard a faint snuffling noise; then that of something being dragged.

There was only one explanation. The tiger was dragging the body of the dead woman away. In another moment he would be gone.

I was on the point of casting caution to the winds and revealing my presence by bringing my weapon out of cover and flashing the torch to risk a shot, when the dragging ceased abruptly. Had the tiger disappeared with the body?

And then the sounds of eating began, and the crunch of bones. They came from the other side of the tree and from behind me.

The explanation was easy. For some unaccountable reason the man-eater had dragged the body back to the very position where he had left it early that morning. Instinct perhaps. At least it indicated one thing: the tiger was not suspicious or alarmed, as I had at first thought. If that had been the case, he would either have slunk away or bounded off with the body. Had he become aware of my presence, he might even have made an attack.

The fact that he had done none of these things clearly indicated that he was not alarmed, but only that he wanted to have his meal exactly where he had left it. Perhaps he had reasoned to himself that some earlier visitor, in the form of a jackal or hyaena, had shifted it.

I breathed a sigh of relief—until I recollected that I would now have to step out of my shelter into the open and around the trunk of the tree if I wanted to take a shot. Then all feeling of relief left me.

You will remember that Bala and Krishnappa had more or less 'fenced me in' with the aid of sticks, leaves, creepers and so forth. To step out, I would first have to remove these obstructions. In doing so

some slight noise would undoubtedly result. The tiger would hear. He might run away, or, far worse than that, he might come around the tree to investigate the cause and find me before I was ready.

There was just one thing to do, and I did that thing. I let the tiger tuck into his meal right heartily.

Each time he tore the flesh or crunched a bone and chewed noisily, I gently untangled a leaf or piece of creeper or removed one of the sticks and slid it down the inside of the hollow tree towards my feet. Thus I cleared the way to step out while the tiger was eating.

Then I raised my right foot into the air and poised it for a minute to restore circulation, before lifting it ever so carefully outside the tree-trunk. I waited; but the tiger was still crunching bones. I steadied myself with my left hand against the hole and very cautiously brought my left foot beside my right one.

For a few moments I was unbalanced to take a shot, and it would have indeed been very unfortunate for me had the man-eater discovered me then. But mercifully he was far too engrossed in his meal.

An inch at a time, I shuffled myself forward around the bole of that tree. Then came the moment when another inch would reveal me. If the tiger happened to be facing the tree he would surely see me. If not, there was a chance that I would not be detected immediately.

The moment for action had arrived and I had to risk it. I raised the rifle, pointing skyward, and placed the stock to my shoulder. I edged an inch forward with each foot. Then I slightly craned my neck to look around the trunk.

My eyes had become accustomed to the diffused light and I saw the tiger lying full-length on the ground over a dark mass that was all that was left of the woman. He was half-inclined away from me, facing the direction whence we had come that evening. The foresight of the rifle would not be visible in that light, and I would have to use my flashlight for the shot.

I raised my left arm gently to support my rifle as I brought it to firing position at my right shoulder. My left thumb frantically groped for the torch switch. Something warned the tiger that all was not well. He looked back over his shoulder as the beam shone forth to frame his head and glowing eyes, while flesh and blood drooled from his lips.

My first bullet took him in the neck, and as he catapulted head over heels I worked the under-lever of my Winchester as I had never worked it before in my life. He was writhing furiously as I pumped into him a second shot, followed by a third. I really could not tell you what happened then. But he just disappeared.

He had been roaring with pain and rage after my first shot. He had roared during the fusillade. He was still roaring and tearing up the

undergrowth in rage and agony, but I could see him no longer. He had leaped into the shelter of the jungle.

I dived back into the hollow of the dead tree as fast as I could scramble and awaited events. I wanted to replace the three rounds I had just fired, so as to have a full magazine ready. But a .405 Winchester does not lend itself to that kind of thing. A 'jam' is likely to occur when putting more rounds into a half-empty magazine. If that should happen, I would be helpless. I decided to leave well alone. There was still one round with which I could hold off the tiger. Although my rifle magazine held five rounds, I usually load only four, keeping one in the breach and three in the magazine when sitting up for carnivora. This is by way of an added precaution against a 'jam'.

I began to wonder if I had acted wisely in getting back inside the tree. Perhaps it would have been better if I had remained outside. I could at least see the tiger if he charged. Now I could not do so till he came out of the bushes and in front of me.

However, it was too late for regrets. I stood still. Perspiration saturated my body and my hands were slippery from holding the rifle. I felt terribly sick and my head ached.

The tiger was still roaring and tearing at the bushes, but in time the sounds subsided and then faded in the distance. The creature was not dead, but at least it had gone away and I was safe. And I was thankful. Then I retched—and felt all the better for it.

Unfortunately, the direction of the tiger's departing roars had not registered on my confused senses and I was uncertain which way he had gone. Under such conditions it would be suicidal to attempt at once to walk to Bala's hut in the darkness. I would have to use my flashlight to find my way there, and that would betray me if the man-eater was lying up in the undergrowth.

So I spent the rest of the night in that damned hollow, drooping on my tired feet. Dawn found me dejected, till I remembered I was lucky to be alive. For that I was glad.

As soon as it was light enough to see, I stepped out of the hollow tree and sat on the ground outside. Have you ever attempted to remain on your feet all night for a stretch of something like thirteen hours? Try it yourself sometime.

For fifteen minutes or so, while the light grew stronger, I rested. Then I got up to see what could be seen. The time I had taken to free myself from the sticks and leaves, and to step out from the tree, while the tiger had been eating, could not have been much more than ten minutes—perhaps fifteen minutes at the most—but the tiger had eaten more than half of the dead woman. Her head and arms had been parted from the body and lay scattered on the grass. One thigh and leg were there too, and part of the other foot. The rest of her was gone,

except for the gnawed vertebrae with a few of the rib bones still attached.

The earth was torn up where the man-eater had ravaged the ground in his agony. Then he had made a jump into the undergrowth a couple of yards away. Here the stems of the bushes had been bitten through and the leaves were smeared with his blood. This had been the place from which I had heard him roaring and rampaging while I had been cowering in the hollow tree. From there the blood trail moved away into the jungle. I followed it for a few yards and found it was leading approximately northwards. I could return to the hut in comparative safety.

I did so. Bala and the guards had heard the sound of shooting from the hut, where they had been lying awake. With the coming of daylight they had advanced for about a furlong and were waiting for me. Indeed, the Chenchus would have come all the way to the dead tree, but Ali Baig cautioned them that I might have only wounded the tiger and there was no knowing where it would be hiding.

I told them all that had happened during that terrible night.

My watch showed that time was 6.25 a.m. I must have fired at the tiger about 8.30 the night before—ten hours previously. He must be dead by now, I thought. Or, if not dead, he must have lost so much blood and become so stiff from his wounds that he would be lying up somewhere in a bad plight. I could no longer restrain myself from following the blood trail.

As Ali Baig was unarmed, I asked him to go back to the hut and await us there. He replied that he was afraid to stay there alone and that he would rather accompany us and take his chance. So we returned to the dead tree.

I had told Bala that, as much as I had not wanted to do so, I had been compelled to let the tiger eat the body of his wife in order to preoccupy and distract his attention while I was freeing myself from the camouflaging sticks and creepers. He had accepted my explanation then. But when we reached the tree and he saw the torn remains of the poor woman, the shock had been too great for him. The little man broke down completely and wept loudly and bitterly.

He said he would not go on till he had cremated the remains. It took all that the two forest guards and I could do to stop him from setting about this business there and then. In fact, it is doubtful if we would have succeeded had not Ali Baig bluntly told him that all of us, and more particularly he, would be in trouble with the local police, who would expect a report about the incident, after which they would conduct some sort of inquiry and hold an inspection of the remains. They would not look kindly upon him if he should cremate the evidence before they had seen it. So we broke branches and covered

the scene of carnage to keep off the vultures that would otherwise soon arrive.

We all hoped we would find the tiger, dead or dying, within a very short distance, and that we would be able to return soon to make the necessary report to the police.

That was where we were greatly mistaken.

The blood trail led through the bushes. As far as I could see, the tiger had been wounded in two places, one of them high up—no doubt by my first shot at his neck. The second wound had left a constantly dripping blood trail, and as we followed it we found a tiny piece of membrane mixed with the clotted blood. To me this indicated a stomach wound.

The animal had first rested beneath a tree within two furlongs of the dead tree. Here mounds of regurgitated, blood-soaked flesh—the flesh of that poor woman—showed that the tiger had suffered a severe fit of vomiting and confirmed that one of my bullets had entered his stomach.

He had carried on from there for another half-mile or so, where he had lain down upon the grass. Two small pools of blood established the fact that he had been hit twice. The stomach wound appeared to be the more severe one, as the bleeding there had been much more copious.

Nevertheless, the animal had still kept going. The blood trail, which had been very prolific at the start, was now less. Outer skin, membrane or fat had perhaps covered the exterior hole made by the bullet where it had entered his stomach, and so had stopped the bleeding. Probably it was only the neck wound that had continued to bleed thereafter and that no doubt accounted for the scantier trail.

We came to a stream between two hills where the tiger had lain in the water, which still held a faint pinkish tinge. A little blood streaked the mud on the further bank. Here the pug-marks were clearly visible for the first time along the whole trail. They were the large quarter-plate-sized pugs of a big male.

Still the trail carried on, but the bleeding had become markedly less. Soon there was only a drop to be seen here and there. I was amazed to say the least of it.

My first shot had been at the tiger's neck. I knew I had not missed, for he had made a complete somersault, which indicated he had been hit. I had fired twice after that and one of those shots had perforated his stomach. The quantities of vomited human flesh had established that also. We had been following a copious blood trail at the start, commencing from the place where the man-eater had torn up the undergrowth in pain and fury. He had rested more than twice after that. All these factors together, and all my experience over the past

many years, cried out that by all the rules of the game the tiger should have died, or have almost bled to death, by now. We should have come across him lying up in a very enfeebled condition in some cover. In fact, we had expected the trail to be a short and easy one.

Instead of any of these expected happenings, however, the man-eater was still pressing on, heading ever northwards. Splashes of blood on the earth and leaves, as it dripped from his wounds or was smeared on the bushes as he passed, were few and far between now and the trail was becoming increasingly difficult to follow. We had travelled far from any footpaths and were many miles into the interior of the jungle, with only a game-path here and there. The terrain had become very hilly, crisscrossed by deep boulder-strewn valleys, each of which was the bed of a tiny, trickling stream. Water was far from scarce, and we could see the tiger had stopped to drink from many of these rivulets. The larger trees of the jungle had given way to dense undergrowth, mostly of lantana and other thorny varieties.

At ten minutes to one o'clock we could find no more blood drops, although the four of us fanned out and cast around in a wide circle. We had reached the journey's end and the trail was dead. The sun beat down mercilessly.

We were a silent party as we made our way back to Gazulapalli, and I was dog-tired when I threw myself into the old armchair that had almost no bottom in the station waiting-room. Sleep came before I could take off my boots.

Mr Balasubramaniam made a telegraphic report to the police that night, and next day the officials arrived by the afternoon train from Nandyal. We went with them to the old dead tree.

What had been left of the unfortunate woman was stinking by now. We could smell it a furlong away. Hordes of blue bottles nestled in swarms on the leaves we had thrown over the bits and pieces. But at least they had been protected from the vultures. I showed the sub-inspector of police the hollow in the tree-trunk where I had hidden the night before, while I related my story.

The notes he made covered some thirteen pages of paper. My statement alone took six.

Bala begged for permission to cremate the remains. The police officer was of the opinion that they should be taken to Nandyal for a post-mortem examination. I vouchsafed no advice, because I could see that the sub-inspector did not regard my action in having set the dead woman out for bait as quite the proper thing to have done. I felt that whatever I advised now might cause him to take exactly the opposite course of action. So I minded my own business. The presence and testimony of the two forest guards, however, eventually turned the tables in Bala's favour, and permission was given to him to cremate

the remains. We were silent witnesses as he and the two guards gathered a pile of dried wood, set the decomposed remains thereon, topped up the pile with more wood and then set fire to the lot. It was a simple and sad ceremony, marred only by the awful stench of burning decomposed flesh. Out of respect for Bala's feelings, I remained there. The police officer went some distance away, leaned against a tree and was terribly sick.

I found it difficult to look Bala in the eye next day. I felt I had let him down. But the little man's intuition sensed this. He came with Balasubramaniam to the waiting room while I sat there and asked the stationmaster to interpret what he was about to say. It was just this. Tell the "dorai" not to feel worried because he failed to shoot the tiger. I know he did his very best. No other man—no, not even I—could have done more.'

And no man could have said more than that to relieve my feelings. I felt better and told Balasubramaniam to thank him for what he had said, and for all the cooperation he had extended to me. His simple tribute was one of the best I have ever received.

I remained in Gazulapalli for another week, but no more news came to me of the man-eater. A panther killed one of my baits at Diguvametta. I went there to verify this and proved it to be a fact. Joseph was not very pleased when I left the remains for the panther to have another feed that night.

At the end of that week I paid farewell to all my newly-found friends who had helped me so unstintingly and made my visit such a pleasure. The baits I gave away to the various forest guards at the different stations, with something more for Bala.

Three months passed after my return to Bangalore. Then a tiger killed a man near the Krishna river in Hyderabad state. Three months later a Chenchu was killed several miles north of Bogara railway station. News of human kills since then have been very few and far between. But they still come in.

Did the man-eater I wounded recover after all? Has he started operations again? Were there two separate man-eaters operating at the time of my visit, the one that had taken the woman gathering *mhowa* flowers at Diguvametta being quite different from the one that had killed Bala's wife?

Were the latest kills the work of one or other of these two tigers—if indeed there ever had been two? Or had they been made by quite another tiger, one that had newly appeared on the scene?

These questions worry me sometimes, for I cannot find an answer. But I would give a lot to know.

Seven

The Big Bull Bison of Gedesal

THIS IS NOT THE STORY OF A REGULAR HUNT, CONCLUDING WITH THE shooting or wounding of the Big Bull Bison I am going to tell you about. If you think that, you are in for a disappointment, for I never even fired a shot at this animal at any time, nor would I ever have done so. For I admire him too much.

He was a brave old warrior, and if he is still alive today he well deserves his title as lord and leader of the herd he cared for so faithfully. If he could understand me, I would be proud to call him my friend.

Gedesal is the name of a small Sholaga village standing at the head of what I call the 'bison range' in the forests of North Coimbatore district. A forest bungalow called by the same name borders the road as it reaches the top of the ascent on its southward journey from the town of Kollegal to the hamlet of Dimbum. This road runs down the side of a hill for five of the seven miles that separate Gedesal from Dimbum. For those last two miles it rises again. Dimbum is at the edge of an escarpment. The road falls steeply, in a series of sharp hairpin bends, from Dimbum to the plains below it to the south, whence it pursues an almost level course to the large town of Satyamangalam.

Gedesal itself is flanked on the west by the towering range of the Biligirirangan Mountains, their slopes a scenic combination of frowning crags jutting out of a green background of lawn-like grass. In the folds of the hills, and along the beds of the myriad watercourses

that tumble downhill, clumps of trees and matted jungle have sprung up. These are commonly called 'sholas', or isolated islands of forest, surrounded by open, grassy areas or outcrops of forbidding rock.

To the east lies another range of hills, much less in altitude, size and grandeur than the mountain range of the Biligirirangan to the west. These low hills are entirely covered by forest, consisting mainly of tiger-grass that grows to a height of ten feet, interspersed with thousands upon thousands of the stunted wild date palms. Towards the middle of the year these palms bear long clusters of the yellow wild dates at the ends of drooping stems—dry, tasteless fruit, indeed, but much favoured by birds and animals alike.

Thus the topography, the vegetation and the dates combine to make the area a favourite haunt for bison, sambar and bear.

A long valley runs from north to south between the flanking ranges of mountains and hills, and along the side of this valley the road from Kollegal to Dimbum wends its lonely, southward way, passing between Gedesal hamlet itself and the forest bungalow of the same name.

This building is exceptionally large for a forest bungalow, and has a long line of outhouses at its rear for the occupation of the menials working for the Forestry Department. Moreover it has a big compound, where some nice specimens of the wild hill-rose grow, the flowers of which bloom in large clusters, resembling small bouquets.

Just south of the bungalow is a low-lying stretch of land, holding a small pond and some marshy ground. Because of the tender shoots of green grass that grow there—entirely different from the coarse tiger-grass in the surrounding area—a small herd of spotted deer is almost always in residence. When I saw them last they were sired and led by quite a sizeable stag with a good head of antlers, his dark brown shoulders being almost black, against which the dappled white spots contrasted markedly.

I hope that no hunter, human or animal, has brought him down, and that he still roams at the head of his harem in that deeply green and refreshingly moist, cool glen—lordly and free as the jungle to which he belongs.

The low range of hills to the east of the road and the deep valley running along the base of the mountains to the west offer wide browsing opportunities to the many separate bison herds that inhabit the area. A perennial stream of considerable size flows down the length of this valley, the road being crossed every now and again by the various tributaries that feed it. A never-failing water supply, even during the hottest summer season, is thereby assured, which is the main factor that contributes towards keeping these animals permanently in residence.

These bison herds number from twenty to forty or even more, the majority being cows and calves of different ages, with perhaps about half-a-dozen sizeable bulls to each herd. The oldest and most mature bull automatically gains supremacy over his younger rivals and becomes the lord and master of that herd until such time as he in turn is overthrown by some younger and more vigorous male, or meets his end in some fashion that accords with the laws of the jungle. Occasionally a big bull will break away from the rest of the herd and pursue his own solitary existence.

Bison suffer severely from diseases such as 'rinderpest', which frequently attack the herds of domestic cattle belonging to the Sholagas, living in the forest or adjacent cattle *patties*. The cattle are let out to graze in the jungle and spread the infection to the bison. It is quite common to come across bison affected by the 'foot-and-mouth' disease which is so fatal to cattle, or to be led by the sight of vultures to the carcass of one that has succumbed to this most deadly of cattle scourges.

The big bull of which my story tells was the leader of a herd of at least thirty animals. Very frequently have I seen him early in the morning when droplets of dew glittered in the rising sun, and sometimes round about 5.30 in the evening, grazing within sight of the road between the 39th and 41st milestones. It was easy to identify him by his crumpled left horn, which was clearly deformed and turned inwards and forwards.

Perhaps the old bull owes his long life to this deformity, as it renders his head worthless as a trophy, though the right horn is beautifully shaped. True it is that some hunter and collector of oddities might value his head as an unusual specimen, but he has been lucky in that such a curiosity-monger does not so far appear to have met up with him. In battle his deformed horn has proved an invaluable weapon, as I am about to relate. He has the natural advantages that would be those of a unicorn, if this legendary animal actually existed, in that he could transfix an opponent in a frontal attack or badly slash him with a toss of his head.

I have often motored along that road on a dark night, shining the sealed-beam spotlight on my car from side to side, to see what I could see and just for the fun of it. Twice or thrice on such occasions the widely-separated blue eyes of a bison have reflected the lamp's rays and upon closer inspection I have found them to be the eyes of the old bull.

My attention was first attracted to this veteran some years ago when I was out for a walk on the lower slopes of the Biligirirangan range. There is a road running through the forest from the western side of the main road. It skirts Gedesal village, crosses the stream, and

then starts to climb over the foothills of the mountain range to disappear eventually over a saddleback and descend a valley on the other side. Finally it leads to a beautiful forest lodge, the private property of Mr Randolph Morris who is one of southern India's biggest and most influential coffee planters. He is also an authority on *shikar* and a hunter of renown, having contributed many valuable articles on the habits of big game and on big game hunting. He was the honorary game warden of the area, well known to the Viceroys and former Governors of British India, and the owner of some of the most beautiful and well-planned coffee estates in the south.

Long before this road makes its way over the saddleback there is a prefabricated shed, the property of the Forestry department, which has been erected for the convenience of its officers on tour and for the use of licensed sportsmen on *shikar*. Some thoughtful soul has made, or caused to make, a ladder of stout twisted vines, which is kept in this lodge and comes in very handy for climbing up to and down from *machans* erected on trees, to those who are not naturally gifted or adapted to this arboreal art.

That morning I had passed this lodge and was walking along a ridge overlooking a bowl-like shallow valley when I heard a clashing and thudding sound, interrupted with snorts of rage. The evidence pointed to a bison fight, and I hurried along, taking what cover was available, in the direction of the sounds. Very soon I saw in the valley below me, but quite three hundred yards away, two large bull bison locked in fierce combat. With horns entangled and foreheads pressed together, they were pushing against each other with might and main, the outstretched taut legs of each animal indicating the tremendous effort he was making to push his opponent back. At intervals one or other would momentarily disengage his horns and head from his rival to deliver a short quick jab before interlocking again, and before the opposing animal could score a similar thrust.

Then I noticed that one of them had a peculiar horn that gave him a distinct advantage over his antagonist which was bleeding profusely from wounds in his neck, shoulders and side.

The fight raged for the next twenty minutes or so with unabated fury, till the gasps that took the place of the snorts of rage that I had first heard, and the glistening sides of the two bulls, soaked in sweat and blood that was clearly visible even at that range, showed that the gruelling pace and strain of the fight was beginning to tell. Froth drooled from the mouths of the bulls and splattered their bodies, falling in splashes to the ground.

I had never witnessed a bison fight before and was very curious to know how it would end. Fortunately I had come alone. Moreover, the breeze blew in my direction. Therefore the combatants were quite

unaware of my presence and fought their fight under natural conditions.

The bull with the crumpled horn seemed to be getting the better of things, and his opponent gave ground, becoming reddened by the gore that flowed from the many wounds in his body. Of course, he had also inflicted some telling jabs on his enemy, but the crumpled horn was obviously giving its owner a decided superiority. After another ten minutes the severely injured animal began to falter. He fell to his knees several times, and at each opportunity that unicorn-like horn embedded itself in some part of the unfortunate animal. Eventually he broke, turned and ran at a staggering trot, the victor following up his advantage by pursuing him and butting his hindquarters. The two animals passed out of sight at a point where the bowl of the valley merged with the surrounding jungle.

Out of curiosity I walked down to the site of the recent combat. The ground had been torn up by the straining hooves of the two contestants and was flecked with blood and foam in a rough circle some twenty yards in diameter.

It was a considerable time after that when I saw my bull again. The second occasion was on another walk one evening on my way to visit a water hole situated on the eastern side of the road about a quarter of a mile from and almost level with the 41st milestone. A tiger had killed a couple of head of cattle belonging to the Sholagas of Gedesal village. They told me they had seen it on several occasions in the evenings, walking along—or crossing—the fire-line that leads past this pool and thereafter cuts across the road.

I went to the water hole at about 4.30 p.m. that day, and walked around its edge to discover what animals had been visiting it. There were the usual tracks of elephant, bison, sambar, spotted deer and of a few wild pigs. The tiger had also drunk there on about three separate occasions so far as I could judge by the age of his pug-marks, although the last time had been at least three days earlier than my visit.

Among the bison tracks were the pointed hoof-marks of what must have been a truly massive bull. The weight of his body had been so great that he sank almost a foot into the mire that bordered the pond. His tracks were also visible in many places in the vicinity, indicating that he was a frequent visitor to this pool. This was rather strange in view of the fact that he had the river, which I have already mentioned, at which to quench his thirst.

I asked the Sholaga who had told me about the tiger, and who had accompanied me, if he knew anything about this bull. He replied in the affirmative and told me that he and all the villagers had seen him many times, and that he had a deformed horn—the left one—which thrust forwards. Immediately my mind flew back to the scene I had

witnessed in that memorable fight, in which a bull with a crumpled horn had completely routed his opponent. I wondered if this could be the same animal and thought it must be so, as such a deformity is extremely rare.

The Sholaga told me the bull frequented the pond, as he kept the herd under his care in that locality; probably because of the exceptionally fine grazing to be had on the low land around the water hole. Then he went on to say that if I cared to take a walk with him, we might be lucky enough to see this animal for ourselves, or even come across the tiger.

At that time the tiger was my immediate quarry and I was not very interested in the bull, so more with that objective in mind I consented. In any case, stalking a bison in broad daylight is a tricky business and depends upon the direction in which the wind is blowing, the cover available, and of course the lie of the land.

We set off on an aimless walk, following cattle trails and game *paths* and crisscrossing the fire-line several times. I remember we were ambling along a narrow track when quite suddenly the long grass parted before us, hardly thirty yards away, to reveal the head and shoulders of a massive bull bison which regarded us complacently and obviously without much concern. It was my friend, the bison with the crumpled horn.

He showed no signs of fear, but just stood looking at us. We advanced another ten yards; then, with a loud swish of the reedy grass, he turned around and disappeared. After that day, as I have said, I saw him on other occasions, and then came the memorable event which drew him to me.

An unidentified hunter, who was also poacher, came along the road one night and shot a cow bison. Before he knew where he was, a bull attacked his jeep and with a toss of his head tumbled the vehicle down a khud that bordered the road into one of the dry tributaries of the river. Fortunately the bison did not follow up its attack, so the poacher suffered only an injured leg and a smashed rifle. The Sholaga who was with him, and was sitting at the side of the jeep on which the assault was launched, had clearly seen the bull and avowed it was the animal with the deformed left horn.

I heard about the incident some months later, on a subsequent visit, and felt pleased that the old bull had acquitted himself so creditably. No doubt the fact that he had tossed the jeep down the khud had caused him to think, in his own bovine mind, that he had disposed of his foe. Had the khud not been there he would probably have followed up his initial attack with another, found the men inside and eliminated them altogether.

It was some time later, in November, 1953, that I was visiting

Dimbum. I had not intended to halt at Gedesal and was motoring along the road when I espied a lone figure walking. Drawing level, I recognised the Sholaga, whose name was Rachen, whom I always employ when I camp at that bungalow. Stopping the car and returning his greeting, I asked him in Tamil: '*Yenna Sungadhi*'—which means: 'What news'?

Rachen replied that just two nights ago the villagers had heard the sounds of a terrific fight in the jungle, not very far from the village, between a tiger and some other animal. From the violence and duration of the combat, which appeared to last for hours, they decided that the tiger's opponent could not be a wild boar, which is the only wild creature of medium-size that fights back against a tiger, and thought it might be an elephant. But then again, had it been an elephant they felt sure they would have heard the trumpeting and screaming which an elephant invariably makes when in trouble or when fighting, or when otherwise excited.

Later in the night the sounds had gradually died away, but they had noticed before that time, from the great noise the tiger had been making, that it had been badly hurt.

Early next morning, impelled by curiosity, the Sholagas had gone to see what had happened and had come upon the scene of the marathon struggle they had heard the night before. The undergrowth had been torn up and trodden down by the combatants, and to one side of this arena lay the carcass of a tiger that had been repeatedly gored and trampled by a bison.

The Sholagas had then promptly removed the skin from the tiger and taken it to the village.

It was about noon when I heard this tale and, having time to spare, felt interested in visiting the spot myself. Seating Rachen beside me, I drove down the narrow track leading to Gedesal village and found the tiger's skin already pegged out on the ground to dry. The raw side was uppermost and had been liberally covered with dry ashes, which is the only preservative known to the Sholagas, salt not being available.

The tiger had been quite a large animal but, judging from the underside of the skin, it had been badly mangled and gored by the bison. There were no less than five distinct holes where the powerful horns had penetrated, and one of them, on the left side, showed where a fateful thrust had pierced the tiger's heart.

I was now more interested than ever and expressed a keen desire to visit the spot where the fight had taken place. Leaving my car, and accompanied by a crowd of Sholagas, I set forth. Less than half a mile away we reached the site of the incident.

'Arena' is the best word I can find to describe it, for indeed there had been a titanic struggle. Great gouts of gore were sprayed on the

surrounding grass and bushes in all directions, which had been flattened by the weight of the contestants and were red with dried blood. The Sholagas pointed out the spot where the dead tiger had been lying.

It was obvious from the quantity of blood that the bison had also been severely injured. On a whim I decided I would like to follow him up if possible, to see if he was dead or dying somewhere in the jungle. In either case, I guessed he could not have moved very far from the scene of the fight in his present condition.

Even an entire novice would have been able to follow that trail, as the bison had left a wide *path* of blood through the jungle. He had passed downhill, heading towards the stream, and I felt certain I would find him there, very likely dead, beside the water.

We forged ahead, not troubling to keep silent. An hour and a half's quick walking along that tremendous blood trail brought us to the stream, and to the bison standing in shallow water and resting himself against the bole of a large tree that was partly submerged. Due to the noise made by the water as it rushed over the rocks, he had not heard us at first, and we were well out of cover before he turned around to face us.

It was the big bull bison of Gedesal, the bull with the crumpled horn.

From where we stood, with the breadth of the stream separating us, we could clearly see the awful wounds that had been inflicted by the teeth and the talons of the tiger on his face, neck, sides and rump. Even his belly was badly lacerated, and something red protruded from it and hung into the water. Perhaps it was a portion of his bowel, perhaps a piece of torn skin; I could not see clearly into the shadows where he stood.

But his eyes were clear and fearless, although pain-wracked, as he stood and faced us. Then he turned and staggered away into the jungle.

I had thought of shooting him to put him out of his agony, but somehow could not find it in my heart to do so after the gallant victory he had won at such frightful cost. In any case, I never expected to see him again.

But very recently I visited Gedesal, and great was my surprise and pleasure when one evening I happened to see him, surrounded by his beloved herd, browsing contentedly on the long grass that borders the water hole on the eastern side of the road not far from the 41st milestone—his favourite haunt.

Long may he live in the jungle to which he belongs.

Eight

The Maned Tiger of Chordi

THIS IS THE STORY OF A VERY BIG TIGER THAT GAVE GREAT TROUBLE to the area in which he lived—or rather to the human inhabitants of the area—and was very troublesome to pursue and finally bring to bag.

In telling hunting stories, it is the purpose of the teller to keep his hearers interested. To do that he has to relate the efforts that ended successfully in the killing of his quarry. Perforce he has to leave out many of the failures and disappointments he encounters, for if he were to describe them all his listeners would soon be bored. But to mention only the successes is to give the impression that efforts to kill a man-eater, whether tiger or panther, are nearly always crowned with success, nearly always easy, and can nearly always be accomplished within a comparatively short space of time—a few days, at most.

In reality, all three of these impressions are very far indeed from the truth, and actual circumstances are invariably quite the opposite. Failures are very many and conditions—physical, mental and nervous—are most arduous; and frequently the animal takes months and even years to catch up with. Sometimes he is never shot.

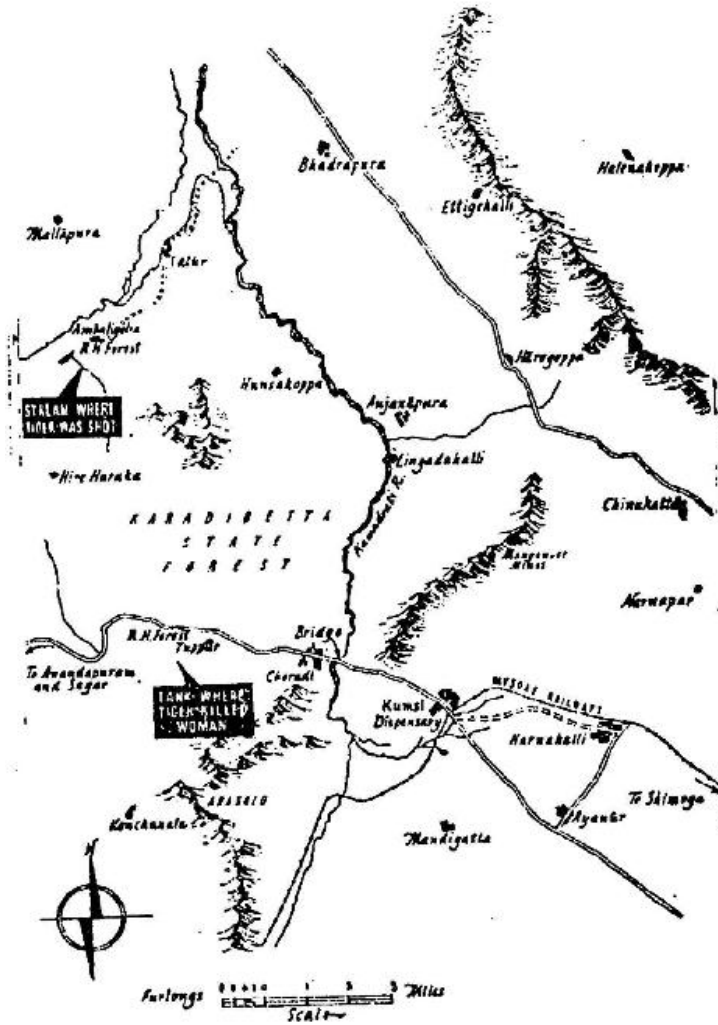
So in this story I am going to tell of a pursuit that began in a casual way and took almost five long and tedious years to bring to a conclusion. Of course it was not a continuous hunt, but a series of sporadic attempts. Between my own efforts there were other hunters from Bangalore and Bombay, not to speak of the local nimrods, who all attempted to bring about the downfall of this wily creature. And

we all failed—until those five years had passed.

He was known as the 'maned tiger' because he had an outstanding ruff of hair around his neck, behind his ears and covering his throat and chin. Naturally this outcrop of hair greatly increased the apparent size of his head, which was always described as being 'that big', the witness stretching out his hands sideways, with fingertips inwardly curved, though very few persons had seen him and lived to tell the tale.

His original habitat was known to be around Chordi, because that was the name of the village where he was first seen and near to which he made his first human kill.

Chordi is a small roadside hamlet, surrounded by jungle, about four miles from the little town of Kumsi, which itself is sixteen miles from Shimoga, the capital town of the district bearing the same name, in the state of Mysore. Shimoga is just 172 miles by a good road from Bangalore. Nearly seventy miles of this road, at the Bangalore end, is of concrete and the rest is tarred, so that a motorist can generally and safely—with the exception of a few nasty, unexpected bends—make quite good time to Shimoga.



From there the road goes on to Kumsi and Chordi, then to the village of Anandapuram about nine miles further on, then eleven miles to the town of Sagar, and thence about sixteen miles, past another village named Talaguppa, to the famous Gersoppa waterfalls, sometimes known as the Jog falls, where the waters of the Sharavati river descend 950 feet in four separate cascades. That is a sight to be remembered and one that has inspired feelings of awe and reverence in the hearts of the most callous and materialistic of men.

There are two Travellers' Bungalows at the head of the falls. The one on the southern bank of the Sharavati river, which is by far the

more modern building, falls within the boundary of Mysore state and is appropriately called the 'Mysore Bungalow'. The opposite bungalow, across the river and on its northern bank, comes under the jurisdiction of Bombay state. It is an older building, very isolated and seldom occupied—for which reason I much prefer it. It is known, of course, as the 'Bombay Bungalow'.

It is rather unusual—and amusing—to find the visitors' books in both bungalows crammed with efforts to write poetry by the various people who have stayed in them from time to time. Undoubtedly the grandeur of the falls has been the cause of awakening this latent desire to wax poetical in minds that perhaps have hitherto remained indifferent. Some of their efforts are really laudable and inspiring; but for the rest I feel it would be difficult anywhere else to assemble such a pile of drivel in one place.

The depredations of the tiger accorded very closely with the pattern of events usually associated with the careers of man-eaters. From being a hunter of the natural game-animals that live in the jungle, he gradually became a cattle-lifter, tempted no doubt by the presence of the thousands of fat kine that are grazed in the reserved forests all over the Shimoga district. Their presence, and the ease with which he could stalk and kill them, in contrast with the difficulties of creeping up on other wild animals, was the first step that changed him from being an inoffensive game-killer into an exceedingly destructive menace to the herdsmen around Chordi.

Attack followed attack as cattle were killed by the maned tiger, till the normal lethargy of the keepers was sufficiently ruffled to decide to do something about it. Matters came to a head when a more enterprising cattle-owner carried his loaded shotgun into the forest with him when he took his animals there for grazing, although it was against the Forestry department's regulations for him to enter the reserve with a weapon but without a game-shooting licence.

However, he did just that, and as luck would have it, the maned tiger chose that very day to attack and bring down one of his animals. From a position behind the trunk of a tree he let fly with his shotgun, and the L.G. pellets badly injured the tiger along his right flank. He disappeared from the vicinity of Chordi for the time being, and all the cattle-men were grateful to the owner of the shotgun for ridding them of such a menace.

Then the maned one reappeared a few miles away, in the shrub jungle that borders Anandapuram. But he still clung to his habit of attacking cattle grazing in the reserve. He had not yet been spoiled—had not yet become a man-eater—because the wound in his side had not incapacitated him in any way.

Once again his unwelcome presence forced itself upon the

attention of the cattle-grazers, and once more he was wounded. This time in his right foreleg, and from a *machan* as he was approaching the carcass of a cow he had killed the previous day. He vanished for the second time. Once more false hopes were raised that his departure was permanent, and once again he reappeared.

However, there was a difference with his second return. No longer was he the obnoxious but nevertheless inoffensive tiger that had been so destructive to cattle, but harmless to their attendants. This time it was the other way round; the cattle were comparatively safe but the herdsmen were in danger—in very great and real danger—because he had become that greatest scourge and terror that any jungle can produce: a man-eating tiger.

The ball that had entered his right foreleg had smashed a bone. Nature had healed the bone, but the limb had become shortened and twisted. No longer could he stalk his prey silently and effectively, no longer could he leap upon them and bring them crashing to earth with broken necks. His approach was noisy, his attack clumsy. His ability to hold his prey was greatly hampered by his deformed limb, and very often they escaped. Even the dull cattle heard his approach and eluded him, or shook him from their backs when he attacked.

Because of his disability he became thin and emaciated, and he was faced with starvation. He—the big maned tiger—was forced to try to catch the rats that ran in the bamboo trees, and even they escaped him.

The only living things that were not too fast for him were the slimy frogs in the pools of scum-covered water stagnating here and there in the jungle, and the sharp-shelled crabs by the water's edge—and men. Sheer necessity, and nothing else, drove him to this new diet of human flesh.

These are the facts about this tiger as I gathered them from time to time. The nature of his wound I only discovered for myself when years later I examined him after I had shot him.

Thus one day a man alighted at Anandapuram bus-stand and began a jungle journey to a tiny hamlet three miles away. He had left the previous morning to go to Shimoga town, and had told his wife to keep his midday meal ready for him the next day, as he would be back in time. The meal was prepared accordingly, but he did not appear. This caused no untoward alarm in the little household because the settlement of business affairs in India, particularly in the lesser towns, is often protracted. Time is of little or no consequence in the East.

Even that evening he did not turn up, nor during the whole of the following day. On the third day his eldest son, a grown lad, was sent to Shimoga to find out what had delayed his father. There he was told that the transaction had been completed three days earlier and that

his father had left to return to his home.

Still no untoward anxiety was felt, as it was thought he might have gone to Sagar, which is beyond Anandapuram, in connection with the same affair.

Five days thus passed without a sign, when the family became really anxious and alarmed. The consensus of opinion was that he had been set upon and robbed by *badmashes* or dacoits on his way home through the jungle and probably killed. The police were informed and a search was made, which brought to light a slipper lying among the bushes beside the track to the hamlet where he lived.

The old slipper was identified by the household as belonging to the missing man, and that gave further credence to the dacoit theory. Several known depredators (K.D.s) living in Anandapuram were taken to the police station and questioned. They avowed their innocence.

A closer and wider search was then made. Shreds of clothing and dried blood-marks were discovered on thorns and bushes, and across the dry bed of a *nullah* the pug-marks of a tiger. Thereafter, no traces were apparent.

Tigers are—or rather were in those years—quite common in those areas, and as there was no direct evidence to connect the pug-marks with the missing man, there was only a very vague suspicion that a tiger might have had anything to do with his disappearance. The presence of the pug-marks might have been purely coincidental.

The mystery was never solved.

A fortnight later a lone cyclist was pedalling the four miles from Kumsi to Chordi. Half a mile from his destination the road crosses the river by a bridge. A parapet of limestone—or *chunam* as it is called—flanks the road. Looking over as he was riding along, the cyclist saw a tiger drinking almost below him. He was at a safe distance from the animal so, applying his brakes, he sat in his saddle with one foot on the parapet and watched the tiger.

The tiger finished drinking, turned and began to reclimb the bank. In a couple of seconds he would disappear in the undergrowth, so for the fun of it the cyclist shouted 'Shoo-shoo'. The tiger stopped, looked backwards over his shoulder and up at the cyclist, snarled and growled loudly.

Very hastily, the man removed his foot from the parapet, applied it to the pedal, and rode as fast as he could to Chordi, where he told his friends that along the road he had met a very nasty tiger indeed which had tried to attack him. Only by God's grace had he escaped.

There was a lull for the next month or so, and then occurred the first authenticated human killing. This happened at a place called Tuppur, which is almost midway between Chordi and Anandapuram. It is a little roadside hamlet, and one of the women had taken her

buffalo down to the stream behind the village so that it might take its morning bath. It appears that the buffalo was lying in the water with only its head above the surface, as is the usual habit with buffaloes, when a tiger attacked the woman who was sitting on the bank watching her protégé. Another woman from the village had just drawn water from the stream and had spoken a few words to the woman sitting beside her buffalo and was passing on. She had scarcely gone a hundred yards when she heard a piercing shriek and looked back in time to see a tiger walking off with her erstwhile companion in his mouth.

Tiger and victim vanished into the jungle while the other woman threw down her water-pot and raced for the huts.

What happened was usual with most incidents of this kind. Considerable time elapsed in collecting a sufficient number of men brave enough to go out to look for the woman. Eventually this was done and they found her, or rather what was left of her.

That was the beginning, and thereafter followed a sequence of human victims, whose deaths took place as far away as the road leading to the Bombay Bungalow near the Jog Falls on the further side of the Sharavati river.

Officialdom moves slowly, and it was a considerable time before the reserved forests in these regions were thrown open to the public for shooting this beast.

A number of enthusiasts turned up and the Bombay Presidency was well represented amongst them. They tried hard and diligently, but luck did not come their way. This particular tiger did not seem to be tempted by the cattle and buffaloes tied up as live bait. Meanwhile the human killings continued.

A friend of mine named Jack Haughton, who went by the nickname of 'Lofty' for the very reason that he was about six foot four inches tall and proportionately broad made up his mind to have a try at shooting this animal and asked me to accompany him. As far as I can remember, this trip was undertaken about one year after the tiger had turned man-eater.

It so transpired that for some reason or the other—most probably because I had already used the leave due to me—I went with him for only a week, telling him I would have to return after that time. We travelled in his 1931 'A' Model Ford car, and the arrangement was that I should return to Bangalore by train after the week had expired, while he would remain for a full month or so.

We motored from Bangalore to Shimoga and stopped there for half a day in order to visit the district Forest Officer, Sagar Forest Range, where these killings had been taking place, to find out the names of the different places where people had been attacked and the exact

dates of those attacks, in order to establish, if possible, by studying the sequence of the attacks, the precise 'beat' being followed by this tiger.

I have already explained that man-eating tigers generally pursue a definite course or itinerary when they become man-eaters. By noting the names of the villages or localities where they kill on a map, with the date of each incident, it is frequently possible to work out the beat for oneself, and forecast roughly in which direction or area the tiger may be at about the time one undertakes to try and bag him.

Our study of events on a map indicated very clearly that this tiger kept within a few miles of the roadside and operated up and down between Kumsi and the further bank of the Sharavati river, as far as the Bombay Bungalow.

This is a very densely forested region with many scattered hamlets, whose occupants are almost entirely devoted to grazing big herds of cattle. A large number of these animals are always killed in these areas each month by both tigers and panthers, so this fact made it difficult to find out whether our man-eater also killed cattle or not. We felt that it was almost certain he did so, as the human kills were too few and far between for him to have subsisted only on a human diet. Our opinion was quite contrary to the local one, which was that he would not touch any domestic animals.

Lofty chose to make his camp at a small forest bungalow situated half a mile from the Tuppur hamlet. It is a picturesque little lodge, standing in the jungle about two hundred yards from the roadside, and the forest in the vicinity is crammed with game, particularly spotted deer. In that year some of the stags carried magnificent heads and we came across quite a few outstanding specimens.

Lofty started operations in the routine fashion by buying three animals for bait. Two of them were young buffaloes, and the other a very old and decrepit bull. One buffalo was tied near the stream where the cyclist had seen the tiger. The aged bull was tied at about the spot where the woman of Tuppur had been carried off. The remaining buffalo we had taken and tied near Anandapuram along the same *path* that the man who had disappeared had been following on his way home.

Having completed these arrangements, we motored on to Jog and arranged two baits there—both buffaloes—tying one of them half a mile or so from the Bombay bungalow and the other on the southern bank of the Sharavati, near the spot where the river is crossed by a ferry plying between the bungalow on the Mysore bank and the Bombay bungalow. This ferry crosses the river about a mile above the waterfalls.

Lofty had therefore five baits in all, and I remember they cost him quite a bit of money. The plan was that we should spend alternate

nights at the Tuppur forest lodge and the Bombay bungalow, checking the baits closest to the place where we had spent the previous night before setting out by car for the bungalow where we would spend the next night.

My calculations, made by the method of checking the dates of the human kills, which were now nine in number, seemed to indicate that this tiger might be somewhere in the middle of this region between Sagar and Anandapuram.

So on the third day I bought a buffalo myself, which I then tied up about halfway between these two places and within a furlong of the main road. We tied this animal about two in the afternoon on our way from the Tuppur bungalow to Jog.

Very early next morning we looked up the two baits tied in the vicinity of the waterfalls. Both were alive. So we set out for Tuppur, halting en route to visit the buffalo I had tied up the previous afternoon. It had been killed by a tiger.

Lofty, being a good sportsman and considering the fact that I had paid for this buffalo, insisted that I should take the shot. But I knew how keen he was and so quite an argument arose. Finally we tossed for it, and Lofty won.

Leaving him up a tree, sitting uncomfortably perched in a fork, I drove to Tuppur lodge to fetch his *machan*, which we had both most thoughtlessly forgotten to take with us on that important day. Lofty's contraption was nothing more than a square bamboo frame about four feet each way, interlaced with broad navaree tape. At each of the four corners was a loop of stout rope which helped when tying the affair to a tree. I also brought three men from Tuppur hamlet along with me to assist in putting up this *machan*.

We ate a cold lunch by the roadside while the men made a good job of fixing the *machan* and camouflaging it with branches. Lofty then had a nap in the back seat of the car till four o'clock, while I chatted with the three men. This was because, being close to the road, we knew the tiger would not put in an appearance before nightfall.

At four I woke him up and he climbed into the *machan* with all his equipment. His weapon was a 8 mm Mauser rifle—a really neat and well-balanced job—which Lofty affectionately calls 'Shorty Bill'. Wishing him good luck and saying I would be back by dawn, I drove to Tuppur, where I left the three men and then returned part of the way to spend the night at the small dak bungalow at Anandapuram, which was closer to where I had left Lofty over the dead buffalo.

By break of day next morning I had reached the spot on the road opposite where he was sitting and tooted the horn of the car. He coo-eed back to me, which was the signal we had agreed upon before parting to signify that all was well.

I set out for his tree and met him halfway, walking towards the car. He told me the good news that he had shot the tiger, which had turned up much earlier the previous evening than we had expected, arriving just after dark.

I was very happy at his success, while Lofty himself was in raptures and simply bubbling over with joy and excitement. I went with him to see the tiger, which was a beautiful large male in the prime of life and handsomely marked with bold, dark stripes.

But I noticed that the he was a very normal tiger. He certainly did not possess the distinctive mane which the official government notification had said was the outstanding characteristic of the man-eater. I was surprised to find that in his enthusiasm over his own success Lofty had apparently quite overlooked this fact and I just did not have the heart to tell him.

I congratulated him very heartily on his success and tried my best to appear sincere. Then leaving him to guard his precious trophy, I motored back to Tuppur to bring four men and a bamboo pole for lifting the carcass.

Returning with the men, we tied the feet of the tiger to the pole and carried him upside down to the car. As Lofty had no proper carrier at the back that was strong enough to support the weight, we spread-eagled the carcass across the bonnet of the car, not only bending the metal in the process, but making it very difficult to drive as, in spite of his height, Lofty could not see the road ahead for some yards because of the body on the bonnet.

In driving through Anandapuram, Lofty stopped to exhibit his prize to the townsfolk who crowded around, and it was then that disillusionment very cruelly came to him. For, no sooner did the people look at the tiger than they exclaimed: 'But, *Sahib*, this is not the man-eater.' 'Of course it is,' replied Lofty indignantly. 'What other tiger can it be? And in any case, how are you so sure it is not the man-eater?' 'Where is the mane?' they asked in justification.

'The mane?' Lofty looked blank at first. Then understanding crept into his eyes. Finally he looked at me accusingly. 'I forgot all about the mane,' he admitted. 'I have shot the wrong tiger. You knew all the time?'

'Yes, Lofty, I knew,' I admitted. 'But you were so happy when I met you this morning and you told me you had bagged the man-eater, that I just did not have the heart to disillusion you. The mane was the first thing I looked for. Of course, there was nothing else you could have done but shoot.' And then, to make it seem more convincing, I hastily added: 'After all, the tiger came when it was dark, and you could not look for a mane even by torch-light. In any case, it is a magnificent specimen and a trophy to be proud of; so cheer up, old chap.'

But Lofty was not so easily consoled. We drove to Tuppur, where I found him so disheartened as not to be in the least interested in supervising the skinning of the tiger, which he left entirely to me. I watched the men at work while Lofty lay moping in an armchair. Several times I tried to buck him up by drawing his attention to the large teeth and claws of the animal, its dark markings and other aspects, but he was not at all interested and refused to be drawn into conversation. He just said: 'Had I known it was not the man-eater I would not have shot the poor brute.'

Instead of throwing off his gloom, Lofty got more gloomy as the day wore on. Then he announced that, if no kills had taken place by next morning, he would like to return to Bangalore.

We were up early next day, but the three baits at our end of the line were all unharmed. Accordingly, we resold them to their previous owners, as already arranged, at about a quarter of the price which Lofty had paid for them. Then we drove to the Jog end of the beat, but both buffaloes were alive there also. We made the same deal with their owners as we had done at Tuppur, and late afternoon saw us in the 'A' Model on our way back to Bangalore.

For some time after this I did not come across any news of this tiger. It was over a year later, I think, that I read in the papers that a charcoal-burner had been killed and wholly eaten by a tiger quite near to Kumsi town and almost by the roadside.

So I wrote to the district Forest Officer (D.F.O.) at Shimoga, requesting him to keep me informed about future kills by telegram if possible.

The forests of Shimoga district, unlike those to the southwest of Mysore state, and in the Madras and Chittoor districts, are heavily sprinkled with villages and hamlets, and widely interspersed with cultivation, particularly great stretches of paddy-fields. The roads are also far more used, both by vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Because of all this, not only may a tiger be anywhere at all and difficult to locate, but tracking is left to the individual hunter's own skill. It is a strange fact that no aboriginal forest tribes inhabit this area, unlike the other jungles of India. The only people who go into the forests are coolies, of Malayalee origin, hired in large numbers from the West Coast of India. Next to them in number are the Lambanis. These last are the 'gypsy tribe' of India, who strangely resemble their Romany cousins in the western world. But only the women are distinctive in appearance. They are lighter in colour than the local people and dress picturesquely, with many ornaments, big, white bone bangles, necklaces of beads of all colours, shapes and sizes, noserings, earrings and rings on their fingers and rings on their toes. They do not wear the saree in the same fashion as the other women of India, but a

distinctive costume, made up of a very widely-skirted sort of petticoat, covered by a very tightly-fitting backless jacket, often displaying an ill-restrained bosom, over which a large shawl-like cloth is draped that covers the head and shoulders. The two halves of their jackets are held together by strings at the back.

The Lambani men, on the other hand, are darker than the women and dress very ordinarily. In fact, almost exactly like the rest of the local villagers, who are Kanarese. They wear rather nondescript loose turbans, and very ordinary or dirty-white cotton shirts, covering short pants or a loin-cloth tied high about their waists. Their knees and calves are generally uncovered, but rough leather sandals protect their feet against thorns.

A curious fact is that the men and women among the gypsies of southern India do not resemble each other in either facial or other physical appearances. Most of the women are as graceful and handsome in features as the men are ungraceful and plain.

They are an outstanding tribe of people and have preserved their individuality very strongly throughout the centuries. I am myself surprised at this, as the laziness of the men is such that one would have expected their tribal distinctiveness to have died away generations ago. It is entirely to the women that must go the praise for prizing their own traditions, and their picturesque dress and appearance, keeping the tribe and its customs so well-defined throughout the years.

These Lambanis, as a whole, are nomads and do not stay in one place for long. They prefer their own encampments of small grass huts in cleared spaces to life in the regular villages. As a rule they are not of much worth and they certainly do not excel as trackers. At the same time, the credit must be accorded to them of being far more cooperative than the local Kanarese.

Among the Lambanis, both men and women are hard drinkers, distilling their own very potent liquor from the bark of the *babul* tree; or from rice, bananas and brown sugar combined; or from the *jamun* fruit after it has been soaked in sugar; or, for that matter, from almost any material they can find—and they are most ingenious at discovering sources.

They will work more willingly in return for wages in kind—mainly food and drink—than for money, which in any case will be mostly spent in purchasing liquor, if they are unable to make it for themselves. However, they are a nice people, and one of India's finest exhibits among the very many interesting races and tribes of curious and distinctive appearance.

The coffee plantations and orange estates in western Mysore owe much to the Lambanis, particularly the women, who form the bulk of

the labour employed by them. The remainder of the labour comes from the West Coast—from people of Malayalam and Moplah stock. These west-coast coolies have one trait in common. They are bound by unbreakable bonds to their homes among the coconut trees, lagoons, rivers and breakers that tumble on the western shores. It is indeed a beautiful country, and I can well understand their fondness for it. Lack of industry and lack of work of any definite sort drives them into the interior in search of employment. But no sooner have they earned and saved some more—for, unlike the Lambanis, they are very thrifty—then back they go to their homeland to enjoy some months of lazy comfort. This universal characteristic makes them rather unreliable as plantation coolies, because one cannot be sure of their regular attendance unless a portion of their pay is held back as a sort of bond. The law forbids this practice to estate-owners, while on the other hand the usual system is to grant advances to the coolies to enable them to buy stocks of gram and other foodstuffs, blankets and odds and ends. As can well be imagined, this is welcomed by the Malayalee coolies, who draw their pay and whatever advances they can collect and then disappear on French leave to their coast-land areas.

And so the planters encourage, and have come to rely upon, the humble and picturesque Lambani gypsy as a mainstay on the estates. For them he has become almost a 'must'.

My personal interest in this state of affairs lay only in the fact that I would have to rely almost solely on my own initiative if and when I went after this tiger. As good as they are as estate-workers, Lambanis are not on a par with the other aboriginal jungle tribes—like the Poojarees, Sholagas, Karumbas and Chenchus—in tracking and general jungle lore. I only wished this tiger was operating in one of the other forest districts where I had willing and experienced helpers to rely upon.

A month or so after writing to the D.F.O. at Shimoga I received from him a letter of thanks and the news that the tiger had attacked and killed a woman who had been gathering leaves from the teak trees that grew by the roadside about midway between Kumsi and Chordi.

For the benefit of those who have not seen the teak tree or its leaves, I should tell you that the latter are large in size and tough in fibre. They do not tear easily. Hence they are much favoured for the manufacture of leaf-plates, on which meals, particularly rice, are served in Indian hotels. Some four or five teak leaves go to make one such plate, which is an enormous affair by all Western standards. They are joined together at the edges, either by being stitched with a needle and thread, or more frequently by being pinned together with two-inch-long bits of 'broom-grass'. These plates are required in hundreds

of thousands to supply the demands of the many eating-houses in Mysore state. Hence their manufacture forms quite an industry in some of the localities where teak trees grow in abundance. The Forest department sells the right of plucking these leaves to contractors, who bid at an auction for that right. The contractors in turn employ female labour and pay the women a certain sum of money per thousand good leaves plucked. Women are hired for this work rather than men as they ask only about half the rate.

The D.F.O. concluded his long missive with a statement expressing his hope that I would come to Kumsi to try and kill the man-eater.

The extent of the area in which the tiger operated, and even more the other conditions I have already explained at some length, made me feel that the quest was pretty hopeless at this stage. Also the question of leave was a great problem. Searching for a tiger under such circumstances might take several weeks, if not some months.

So I set myself the task of writing a very diplomatic reply. While profusely thanking the Forest Officer for his letter, I endeavoured to convince him of the time factor involved in trying to locate or pin down the man-eater in any particular locality. I explained that I did not have the time to spare just then to undertake a prolonged trip. I also suggested that he inform all forest stations and police stations in the area to warn the inhabitants to beware of the man-eater, and to move in daylight only and in groups, keeping to the main roads; also that grazers and contractors' coolies should temporarily cease operation. Should another human kill occur, I suggested he ask the police, as well as his own subordinates, to urge the relatives of the unfortunate victim to leave his or her remains untouched and send me a telegram. I also suggested that the Forestry Department might materially help by sanctioning the purchase of half-a-dozen buffaloes, and to tie them out at intervals along the area where the tiger operated. I promised to come, upon receiving telegraphic news of a fresh victim, be it animal or human, on the condition that the body of the victim had been allowed to remain where the tiger last left it.

Back came the response to this letter on the third day. It deeply regretted that I had been unable to come, and added that it would be impossible to ensure that all the villagers living in such a wide area followed the precautions I had suggested. Further, relatives would not consent to the body of the loved one being left out in the jungle as a bait to entice the man-eater to return. They would demand that they should remove and cremate it at once. Lastly, he said that there was no provision under the rules whereby the Forestry Department could undertake the expense of buying six live buffaloes for tiger-bait.

Of course, I had anticipated the replies I would receive to these two suggestions. As a matter of fact, I had merely made them to bring

home indirectly the problem I was up against in looking for the tiger, which was like searching for a needle in a haystack. That first letter, asking me to come to Kumsi at once, gave the impression that the writer had perhaps overlooked some of the snags involved, and I wanted him to appreciate my side of the picture.

Nothing more happened for the next few weeks and then the man-eater struck again, this time making a double-kill between Chordi and Tuppur. News of this tragedy came to me in a telegram from the D.F.O.—quite a long one—which stated that the tiger had attacked a woodcutter and his son on the high road opposite the Karadibetta Tiger Preserve near Chordi. He had killed the man and carried off the son. Would I please come at once?

The Karadibetta Tiger Preserve borders the northern side of the road here. It is a large block of teak and mixed jungle, set aside by the order of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore and the state Forestry department to provide a Sanctuary, where shooting is not allowed.

The enlightened ruler of this state, with the advice and cooperation of his far-sighted and equally enlightened chief conservator, has allocated forest blocks in different districts of Mysore state as game sanctuaries for the preservation of wild life. In such places, shooting is strictly forbidden. This advanced policy of Mysore state was a brilliant example to the rest of India of how a far-sighted ruler and his able assistant have pioneered in game-preservation. Such initiative may well be emulated throughout the subcontinent, where wild life of every kind is being rapidly shot out.

In this particular case perhaps, the man-eater had broken the rules of the game by taking refuge in the Sanctuary, intended to be the home of well-behaved normal tigers. I thought I would go and see for myself, as it was significant that the majority of human kills had occurred between Kumsi and Anandapuram. The Karadibetta Sanctuary is almost at the hub of this area.

I left Bangalore very early in the morning next day, after getting together the necessary kit for a ten-day stay in the jungle, which was the longest I could afford to be absent from town. Owing to large sections of the road being under construction for concreting, it was two o'clock in the afternoon before I could reach the D.F.O. at Shimoga, where I halted briefly to thank him for his communications.

He was good enough to afford me still further assistance by handing me two letters addressed to his subordinates, the Forest Range Officers stationed at Kumsi and at Chordi. One directed them to render me all possible help, particularly in purchasing live baits, which is sometimes a bit difficult in Mysore state, while the other ordered them to permit me to go armed into the game sanctuary at Karadibetta in pursuit of the man-eater.

Once more I thanked him and then hastened on to drive the sixteen miles to Kumsi. The range officer there, after reading his superior's letter, assured me of the utmost cooperation and said he would come along in the car with me to Chordi to meet his brother officer, the ranger stationed at that place.

We covered the next few miles in a short time. The range officer at Chordi was a Mangalore Christian; that is to say, he came from the town of Mangalore on the West Coast, one of the earliest seats of Christianity in India. He was most enthusiastic about helping me, and called his subordinates at once and asked them to summon the other woodcutters who had witnessed the incident in order that I might talk to them.

These men arrived after a few minutes and related the following story.

A contractor at Shimoga had recently purchased the right to fell trees in a certain sector of the forest, a mile from Tuppur for charcoal-burning. He engaged the services of both of them, as well as of the woodcutter who had been killed and his seventeen-year-old son. They all had their homes in Shimoga, but had decided to live temporarily at Chordi village while the felling operations in the area lasted.

They had risen early in the morning of the day when the killing had taken place—which was now two days earlier—and had set forth to walk the three miles to where the felling was being done. They were passing by the Karadibetta block, which was on their right-hand side, when the son asked his father for a 'pan' leaf to chew.

I would like to interrupt my story here for a minute or two, for the benefit of those who do not know what the 'pan' leaf is. It is the longish heart-shaped leaf of the betelvine creeper and is a great favourite among all classes of people in southern India, more particularly among the labourers. It is made into what is known as a 'beeda'. On the outspread leaf some 'chunam' or white lime is placed, together with three to four tiny pieces of the areca-nut, which is called 'supari', perhaps a few shreds of coconut and some sugar. The betel—or 'pan-leaf, as it is called—is then wrapped around the ingredients and well chewed. The white lime and the 'supari' causes saliva to flow copiously and colours it blood red. As they walk along chewing, these peopole expectorate freely, leaving blood-red marks from their saliva on walls, pavements, and indeed everywhere. Europeans, who are newcomers to India and see traces of these marks everywhere, are generally thunderstruck at what they sometimes think to be the large number of cases of advanced tuberculosis in the country.

Returning to our story. The father stopped to hand the leaf to his son. To do so, he first had to remove it from the corner of his *loincloth* where it had been kept tied up in a knot. Meanwhile, the other two

men had walked on. They heard a roar and looked back to see the son lying on the road with a tiger on top of him, while the amazed father stood by, his hand still extended in the act of offering the pan to his son.

They then saw the father perform a magnificent art—which was to be the last of his life and the supreme sacrifice. The old man rushed forward, waving his arms about, shouting at the tiger to frighten it off. What happened next was very quick.

The tiger left the boy for a moment and whisked around on the father, leaping upon him and biting fearfully and audibly at the man's throat and chest. Blood gushed like a fountain from the father's gaping wounds. Then leaving him lying on the road, the tiger leaped back upon the son, who was sitting up dazedly watching his father being done to death.

At that juncture the spell was broken and the two men turned tail and ran as fast as they could to Tuppur, nor did they once look back to see what had happened to the boy or his father after the last scene they had witnessed.

Tuppur, as I related, is quite a small hamlet. Besides, nobody there possessed a firearm. So a dozen men set forth to Anandapuram to tell the police and call someone with a gun.

It chanced that on the way they met a lorry going towards Chordi to collect sand from the stream where it passed under the bridge, at the spot where the cyclist had seen a tiger some time previously.

The men stopped the lorry and asked the driver to turn around and take them quickly to Anandapuram so that they could report what had happened. But the driver was an exceptionally bold individual, or at least appeared to be so. If they would all get into his lorry, he would drive down the road to the spot where this 'fairy-tale'—as he openly described it—had taken place. Then they would all see what they would see. 'What about the tiger?' somebody had asked. 'You have an open truck. Supposing it jumps in amongst us and kills some of us?' 'Brother,' the driver had announced, stoutly, 'I am here; so you have nothing and no one to fear. Do you think I shall be idle, waiting for the tiger to jump? I shall run my truck over the brute in a jiffy.'

Thus encouraged by the brave words of the driver, the twelve men had climbed on to the lorry. Very soon they had reached the spot. I was told the driver was really surprised when he saw the father lying on the road in a great pool of his own blood—quite dead by that time. He had thought the whole story had been concocted from beginning to end.

Of the son there was absolutely no trace.

The driver had lost a good deal of his self-confidence by this time. The thirteen men stopped long enough to put the dead body of the

elder woodcutter into the lorry. Then they had driven to Chordi at top speed. There they had picked up the range officer and driven on to Kumsi where, after some slight delay, they were reinforced by the Kumsi range officer and the sub-inspector of police. The whole party had proceeded in the lorry to Shimoga where detailed reports were made to the police and to the Forestry Department. A perfunctory postmortem, for the sake of formalities, was held on the woodcutter and his body was handed over to his relatives late that night.

Next day a party of armed police returned in the same truck to look for the son. It was said that a blood trail could be seen, and a drag-mark where the man-eater had carried his victim through the bushes and into the game sanctuary. After that, nobody appeared to be competent enough in woodcraft to follow the trail, so that the police party returned to Shimoga that evening to report that they had failed to recover the body of the son.

And that, as far as I could see, was the complete story of the Tiger's latest exploit, as I was able to gather the details from the two woodcutters who had been eye-witnesses to the whole episode and the subsequent events.

The Chordi range officer served coffee, after which he and his colleague who had accompanied me from Kumsi, together with the two woodcutters and myself, set out for the scene of the attack on the roadside opposite the Karadibetta Tiger Preserve.

I had often travelled along this road before, and this was the second occasion on which a tiger I was after had taken refuge within this game sanctuary. The first time had been when a wounded animal from the village of Gowja had made for the sanctuary, and I was able to bag it just before it had entered within the boundary, which story I have related elsewhere.*

The range officers had visited the place already and were able to point to the exact spot where the tiger had made his attack on the father and son. Traffic had been considerable and all traces of blood had been obliterated during the intervening three days under the wheels of the many buses, trucks, private cars and bullock-carts that had traversed the road.

The sanctuary itself starts a few yards from the road in the form of a teak plantation. The trees at that time were of nearly uniform height, about twenty feet tall, having been planted in straight lines by the Mysore Forestry department some ten to fifteen years previously. The plantation extended thickly into the sanctuary for about two furlongs before it gave way abruptly to the natural jungle.

Tracking beneath the teak trees, for traces of a wounded animal leaving a distinct blood trail, is next to impossible. The ground is carpeted with fallen and dried leaves which take or leave no

impression. In this case, the boy the man-eater had carried had apparently bled but little. Although the woodcutters pointed out the exact spot where the beast and its victim had disappeared, we were able with diligent searching to find only three places where blood had dripped on to the teak leaves. It was not worth wastig time on a further search.

I knew the sanctuary extended northwards to a stream and cart-track that connected the village of Gowja on the west with another village named Amligola to the east. The cart-track and stream formed the northern boundaries of the sanctuary proper, although the jungle itself extended for many more miles. A wise plan appeared to be to tie four live-baits on the four boundaries of the sanctuary, and another at its centre, as I had obtained special permission to shoot this tiger within this hallowed area if occasion arose.

I told the two range officers (R.O.) that I would need their cooperation in procuring these five baits, as past experience in this area made me rather sceptical of being able to get as many as five animals because the people opposed the sacrifice of cattle as baits and would not cooperate. They told me not to worry and that they would have the baits sent to me by nine o'clock the following morning.

At Kumsi is a forest lodge—the one at which the emergency operation had been performed to amputate the arm of the Reverend Jervis after being mauled by a tiger. I decided to camp at this bungalow, and asked the Kumsi R.O. to let me see the baits he could get before having them driven to Chordi to join the others which his counterpart at Chordi had undertaken to procure. I did this because I am quite particular about the live-baits I use. Very sick or aged cattle, already close to death's door, are often palmed off to a *sahib* as bait. He then wonders why the tiger does not readily kill them. But the tiger is a *shikari* and a gentleman, like the *sahib* himself, and not a jackal to be satisfied with a diseased bag of bones.

My companions had been very fidgety while I had been talking about the baits, for it was six o'clock and the shades of night were fast approaching. I had not been unduly nervous, however, as I knew we were safe as long as the five of us kept close together. We threaded our way through that dense teak plantation in a very closely-knit bunch, I can assure you, till we regained the car standing on the road. It did not take long to drop the Chordi officer and the two woodcutters at the former's residence, and we were back at Kumsi in less than fifteen minutes.

I slept soundly at the forest lodge that night and went across early next morning to the R.O.'s quarters to see how he was getting along with the job of buying the baits. Despite his confidence of the evening before, I felt that with all his influence as a local forest officer, he had

underestimated the difficulties he faced. It was as well I went there, for he had not yet started on the job.

To cut a long story short, it was past 10 a.m. before he had got three animals together. One was a buffalo-calf. The two others were scraggy old bulls. I did not at all approve of the latter, but the R.O. said it was the best he could do. Moreover, they cost me quite a lot of money.

We assigned three men to do the task of driving them along the four-mile stretch of road to Chordi and set off for that place in my car at eleven, reaching our destination just ahead of the three animals.

The Chordi R.O. had procured a half-grown bull—quite a nice animal, brown in colour—and said the second bait in the quota that he was to fill had been sent for that morning and was coming soon. It took an hour to arrive, and it was twelve-thirty before we had all five animals together. Half the day had already been wasted.

As a result, we were able to tie out only three of them that day. The best, the half-grown brown bull, I tied in approximately the centre of the sanctuary. The buffalo-calf was tied a few yards inside from the road to the south, where the attack had been made. The bait on the eastern flank of the sanctuary, which was incidentally about five miles north of Chordi, was one of the old white bulls.

Again it was sunset by the time we had finished, and I left the remaining two animals at Chordi, saying I would return very early the next morning to select the places to tie them out, which you remember were to be the remaining two sides of the rough rectangle formed by the sanctuary, on its northern and western flanks.

Before dawn next day I was motoring back to Chordi along with my friend the Kumsi R.O., who had been up and ready, waiting for me. A large sambar stag ran across the road about halfway to our destination and he remarked that it was a lucky sign.

At Chordi, the R.O. there said he would accompany me to tie out the remaining two baits, and he instructed his subordinate, a forester, to take two forest guards and one of the men who had been with us the previous day, and so knew where they were located, to see if the baits to the east and the south of the sanctuary were alive. We ourselves would look up the third one, tied out in the centre of the sanctuary, as we would make a short cut through it before turning off to the western and northern boundaries. We all set out together, and it was over an hour and a half later that we came to the bull-calf I had tied near the middle of the sanctuary. It was alive and well.

You must not overlook the fact that in tying each live-bait, the question of feeding and watering it each day had to be considered also. To feed it is not much trouble as a bundle of hay or grass is sent along for its consumption each twenty-four hours, but watering often

provides quite a problem. Of course a pot or a kerosene tin might be provided and refilled with water each day, but this method has its own snags. Invariably the animal knocks over the receptacle, or breaks it if it happens to be a pot, while the proximity of a kerosene tin often makes a tiger too suspicious to attack. So the best method is for the men who visit the bait each day to untie it and lead it to some pool or stream, water it there and then bring it back. Rarely, however, does such a pool or stream happen to be handy for the purpose, and frequently the beast has to be led for a mile or more to a suitable place. Villagers are mostly lazy and apathetic by nature, and they generally feel such a long walk is unnecessary. In their logic, the animal has been tied out to be killed, anyhow. So why worry about watering it? This is a point that all hunters who tie out live-baits in India should bear in mind. If they do not supervise these daily visits, or at least employ reliable men to do the work for them, and should a tiger or panther not make a kill, it is almost a certainty that the poor bait has spent a very parched and thirsty week, unless the place where they have tied him has water close by, or it has been provided in a container.

In the present case there was a stream half-a-mile away. We led the animal there, allowed it to drink its fill and then brought it back.

You may wonder if it is not easier to tie the bait beside a stream or pond to overcome this problem of watering it. Very often this is done, as the tigers themselves visit such spots to drink. But there are other factors, too, to be considered. *Nullahs*, game-trails, fire-lines and certain footpaths, cart-tracks and even sections of roads, along which tigers are known to walk frequently, are equally good places to tie up, and may have an added advantage of tiger pug-marks being noticed there regularly. The places at which these tracks intersect are even better. Tigers do not always stroll along the banks of streams, especially where streams are many. We had tied this particular bait on a game trail along which tigers often walk, so the Chordi range officer had assured me the previous evening, when we had been searching for a likely place.

We secured the two animals we brought with us to the feet of convenient trees at suitable places on the western and northern boundaries of the sanctuary. But it was past noon before we had finished.

Of course you should not for a moment imagine that, by doing all this, we had completely ringed the tiger within the sanctuary. For the sanctuary extended for miles and it by no means followed that, wherever he came out, he would be confronted by one of my baits. I had only done what was possible under the prevailing conditions, and the rest was left to fate or luck, whichever name you prefer. And fate

played a fickle game that day.

It was close on three p.m. and we were on our way back and close to Chordi, when a group of men tilling their fields on the outskirts of the clearing that lay around that hamlet informed us that the forest guards we had sent out that morning had found that the buffalo-calf, tied near the spot where the man-eater had killed the two men, had been killed by a tiger the night before. They said the guards had been unable to get word to us as they did not know exactly which way we had gone or how we would return. So they had told all passers-by to inform us if they happened to meet us on the way.

After hearing this news we hurried back to Chordi, where the two range officers roundly abused the guards for not coming to inform us of what had happened. They were hardly to blame, poor fellows, for we ourselves had been on the move the whole afternoon, and had they come to try and catch up with us they were very likely to have failed and caused still greater delay. In the circumstances, I felt they had done the wisest thing by remaining 'put' at Chordi and sending word by all who passed through the village. In any case, it was not too late to put up a *machan* if we hurried, and the news that they had taken the precaution to cover the kill with branches—against a visit by vultures—caused me to intercede on their behalf.

By 3.30 p.m. my Studebaker was standing on the road to the south, opposite the place at which we were to enter the teak plantation and walk the little distance to where we had tied up the buffalo-calf. In three minutes we had unroped my folding *charpoy* from the luggage-carrier at the back of the car. I had made this *charpoy* quite recently and it was an improvement on the old one, in that the frame was only a little more than half the normal length. It was therefore easy to transport on my luggage-carrier without overlapping the width of the car at either end. Wide khaki *navarre* tape, for comfort and for unobtrusive colouration, was what I sat upon, the bands of tape being interwoven in the manner of a mat. The ends of the tape were permanently looped around the bamboos that formed the rectangular frame. The four legs at the four corners were but a foot long, extending beyond the rectangular frame for about six inches above and below. This was to allow sufficient purchase by which to tie the *machan* to a tree. The whole structure was simple, light, very portable and most comfortable; above all it did not creak at the slightest movement, as did any normal *machan* put together with branches lopped from trees.

Although the average height of the teak trees here was about twenty feet, being comparatively young, there were a few of much greater age and therefore taller; I had tied the buffalo at the foot of one of these, in case the occasion should later arise for putting up a

machan. There was no other choice in this instance, for there were no other trees than teak growing in that plantation, and as teak trees have their branches fairly high up, it meant that I had to sit at a greater height from the ground than usual.

That confounded tree gave me a devil of a lot of trouble to climb, as there were no branches for the first twelve feet, and I never excelled as a climber of perpendicular poles. However, I stood on the shoulders of one of the forest guards, when all willingly helped to push and shove my legs a little higher till I could get a grip on the first branch and haul myself up. Due to the large size of the teak leaves, it was a simple matter to hide the *machan* completely from view. Moreover, as they were the only leaves growing there, the camouflage arrangements we made were most efficient, in that the *machan* became inconspicuous and blended naturally with the surroundings. The fork of the tree where we had placed the *charpoy* was over twenty feet from the ground.

The calf's neck had been broken and half the beast had been eaten, but there was just about enough left to justify another visit by its killer.

Neither of the range officers could drive a motorcar, nor could the two forest guards, but as the two woodcutters had also come along with us, I told the six of them to push my car at least half-a-mile or more away in order not to alarm the tiger should he cross the road anywhere nearabouts. Actually I had not thought of this until we were unroping the *charpoy* from the car. In any case, the road was more or less level, and the six men should not have too much trouble in trundling my 'Stude' along.

It was just 5 p.m. when they left me on the teak tree, and I figured that in another twenty minutes or so they would have moved the car and the way would be clear for the tiger to cross the road, provided he came from that direction. Perhaps I was being unduly optimistic, and he would not come at all.

Well, he came all right; but it was only at about a quarter past eight, when it was quite dark He gave me quite a lot of time to know beforehand, or rather the herd of spotted deer with their shrill calls, and a barking deer, with his hoarse, guttural 'Khar-r-r Khar-r-r' bark, did this for him. They had announced his passing to all the denizens of the jungle for the last mile or so of his journey. No wonder tigers are reticent animals. The popularity—or is it unpopularity?—that is often forced upon them by the humbler inhabitants of the forest must indeed be embarrassing. On this occasion, I am sure that the tiger had felt more than embarrassed.

Anyway, he came without undue caution, and I could hear his heavy tread crunch the dry fallen teak leaves long before he stood

over his kill.

I shone my flashlight and he looked up at me, full in the face. It took about three seconds for me to notice, even in torch-light, that he did not appear to have any distinctive 'mane'. But I could not take the chance and he dropped to a bullet through his heart.

I waited fifteen minutes, just to make sure he was dead. He did not stir and I was sure. So I descended, having to jump the last seven or eight feet down from that infernal tree. I am perhaps heavier than I should be, and the jolt with which I came to earth did not cause me to think kindly of the practice of leaping from trees. I approached the dead tiger and looked carefully. I muttered invectives then. As I had known, even as I fired, this was not the man-eater; for the dead beast had no ruffle of hair at his neck. Once more the culprit had escaped, and once again an inoffensive tiger had paid the penalty. Besides, I would have some explaining to do to the D.F.O. at Shimoga. He had given me special permission to shoot the man-eater in the tiger sanctuary—but definitely not a harmless beast.

Well, it was just too bad.

I regained the road and walked towards Chordi, expecting to come up with my car where the men had pushed and left it. But there was no car on the road.

Poor fellows, I thought. They had misunderstood me and pushed it all the way to Chordi, which was about two miles.

I came to Chordi and to the Ranger's quarters. Both officers were there. I announced that I had shot a tiger, but that I was almost sure it was the wrong tiger, as it had no mane.

It might be the man-eater after all, they argued. Perhaps he had dropped his mane in the last two years. Or perhaps he never had a mane from the very beginning and that the description was only a myth. That was a point, I conceded; but my hopes did not rise.

Then I asked them where they had left my car. Car? Why, sir, they explained, you left it pointing up the road, away from Chordi. We did not know how to turn it towards Chordi, while you had very definitely instructed us to push it away from that spot for at least half-a-mile. We did that, sir, but in the opposite direction.

Well, life is like that, I said under my breath. It has its ups and downs. Tonight was one of those in which the 'ups' predominated—or was it the 'downs'? I could not find the answer.

Some more coffee followed. Then a carrying party assembled with bamboos, lanterns and ropes, and we made our way back. While the men were securing the tiger to fetch it to the road, I walked in the opposite direction and found my car exactly four furlongs away.

We were back at Kumsi in a little over an hour.

Next morning I skinned the tiger, while the two range officers

wrote out their official report to the D.F.O. at Shimoga. I had shot a tiger without a ruff, they wrote. It might not be the man-eater. The special permit I had in my possession enjoined that I should shoot the man-eater and nothing else within the boundaries of the Karadibetta Sanctuary. They closed their joint statement by leaving it to their superior officer to 'take such further and necessary actions you best deem fit'.

Then they apologised to me for. having had to write such a report.

I waited till my leave was over, but none of the other baits was killed. The D.F.O. at Shimoga wrote to me officially that his rangers had reported I had shot a tiger within the sanctuary which was said not to be the man-eater, whereas the permit handed to me had been for the man-eater and no other animal. Would I please explain?

Now, I have lived all my life in India. As such, the 'redtapism' that goes with all government transactions was well known to me. But I did not get annoyed at receiving the D.F.O.'s comunication. I wrote back an official letter stating that I regretted he had been misinformed that the tiger I had shot was not the man-eater. I affirmed that it was the man-eater itself, and no other tiger, that I had shot within the sanctuary in accordance with the provisions of the special permit that had been so kindly granted to me for that purpose.

So what? Everybody was happy. Official decorum had been amply satisfied on all sides. All concerned had strictly and very properly performed their duties.

The time came for me to return to Bangalore. I thanked the two range officers for their help, sold the remaining four baits back to their owners for less than a quarter of the price I had paid for them, and set out on the homeward journey. On the way I stopped at Shimoga to pay my respects to the D.F.O. He informed me that I had replied wisely to his letter asking for an explanation and apologised for having written it, saying he had to do so in face of the report that his two range officers had made to him. I told him not to worry and that I was accustomed to such things, adding that it was I who had told the ranger officers that I had shot the wrong tiger when I discovered it had no mane. We parted good friends.

A whole year went by. There had been no more kills since the old man and his son had fallen victims. That had been somewhere about the beginning of the previous year. Or it may have been a few months later—I really forget now. Everyone thought the story of the maned man-eater had been a fable and that I had shot the actual miscreant. I thought so, too, till disillusionment came.

A tiger killed a man on the outskirts of the town of Sagar, which, as I have said, was on the road beyond Kumsi and Anandapuram, before it reached the Jog Falls. A fortnight later he killed a second

man near Anandapuram, and then within the next month another man and woman at the villages of Tagarthy and Gowja respectively. Both these places are within a ten-mile radius of Anandapuram. Early in August he carried off a Lambani boy in broad daylight. He had been grazing his cattle close to the main road on the outskirts of Kumsi town.

The man-eater had returned from wherever he had gone after killing the old woodcutter and his son beside the sanctuary, and now was killing in real earnest. Or if it was not him, he had been replaced by another of his kin who was taking human victims at a far faster rate.

I manipulated matters to get a week's leave, which was the most I could manage, and motored to Kumsi. The D.F.O. at Shimoga had been transferred and another officer, whom I did not know, had taken his place. But he wished me success. I enquired of him as to whether the two range officers at Kumsi and Chordi were the same that I had met there early the previous year, and was glad when he answered in the affirmative.

It was a meeting of old friends, therefore, that took place at Kumsi when I met the ranger again at his quarters, and the same a little later at Chordi, when I met his colleague. Both the officers were of the opinion that the present man-eater was quite a different animal, and that I had indeed killed the right tiger over a year previously within the sanctuary. Their reason for saying so was the fact that no human kills had taken place since that time, till within the last couple of months. If I had not shot the man-eater, then where had he been for all those months? Once a man-eater, always a man-eater. A tiger has never been known to give up the habit altogether. So wherever this tiger had strayed, he must have killed at least some human beings during that period and we would have heard of it.

I must say their argument appeared very sound, and I was convinced in spite of myself.

We held a conference over what to do next. This tiger had killed at Sagar, Anandapuram, Tagarthy, Gowja, and now at Kumsi. It was the same area as that over which the other man-eater—the so-called maned tiger, if there had ever been such an animal—had operated two years earlier and more. Where was I to tie my baits? Where should I begin? We could not quite make up our minds.

The matter was decided for us the next day. As luck would have it, the tiger took a herd-boy in broad daylight at Amligola, which you may remember was the terminal point of the northern boundary of the Karadibetta sanctuary at its eastern end. In other words, Amligola formed the northeastern corner of the rough rectangle that was the sanctuary. The forest guards there hastened to report the matter to

their R.O. at Chordi headquarters, who came to Kumsi at once to tell me about it. It was 3 p.m. when he arrived.

To reach this place, Amligola, the two range officers and I had to make a detour and follow a very, very rough cart-track beyond Chordi. Amligola boasts a delightful little forest lodge, with the stream that forms the northern boundary of Karadibetta flowing close behind it. This stream empties itself into a large tank about two miles away. The boy had been grazing cattle by the side of that tank. The tiger had walked up the bed of the stream and had attacked the boy at about nine in the morning. He had not touched the cattle, although they were feeding all around the spot where the boy had been standing. After the killing, the tiger had walked back with his victim along this stream and into the jungle.

I was shown the pug-marks of the tiger as it had come towards the boy, and its tracks on the return journey, where a drag-mark, made probably by the boy's feet as they trailed along, could be clearly seen. There was hardly any blood along the trail.

It was late evening by the time we had seen all this, and it had become too dark to try to find the body of the poor youngster. This was a great pity. I chafed at the unfortunate circumstance that had brought the news to us at Kumsi so late. Although we had made every possible effort to arrive earlier, the bad cart-track leading to Amligola had wasted time, as I had not wanted to break a spring or an axle. Had I been able to find the remains that evening. I would have sat up over them for the tiger to return. I cursed my bad luck.

The range officers slept in one room of the forest lodge. I slept in the other. The two guards had gone to a godown which adjoined the kitchen, a separate building to the main bungalow, where they barricaded and bolted the door.

A tiger started calling shortly after midnight. He appeared to be within a mile of us. He called again and the range officers heard it. They tapped on the door that separated our rooms to attract my attention, in case I should be asleep. I opened the door and let them in, telling them that I had been listening to the calls myself.

I then opened the main door leading on to the narrow front verandah of the lodge. Moonlight poured down on the jungle around us, and shone in at one end of the verandah. Only in a tropical land can one ever hope and appreciate to the full the eerie thrill of a moonlit night in a forest. As I gazed outside, drinking in the wonder of it all, the tiger called again, this time much closer. Suddenly I realized that the beast was walking along the bank of the stream that flowed a few yards behind the bungalow and would probably pass within the next ten minutes. Was this the man-eater?

I decided to chance my luck.

It took only a couple of minutes to fix my flashlight on to its two clamps along my rifle barrel. I ran out of the bathroom door at the back of the lodge, brushed through the thin hedge of young casuarina trees that bordered the compound and ran down the slope at the rear that led to the bed of the small stream.

I could see the surface of the water glistening and twinkling in the moonlight, although it was very dark under the trees which grew by the bank on which I stood. I have told you that this stream formed the northern boundary of Karadibetta. The opposite bank was within the sanctuary. The forest lodge and the bank on which I was now standing were just outside its limits.

The tiger called again. It was fast approaching and hardly a quarter of a mile away. I would have to act quickly if I wanted to ambush him.

The all-important question was this: along which bank was he walking? If he was on the opposite or Kardibetta bank, I would have to get much closer to the water's edge if I wanted to see him in the moonlight and get in the shot. On the other hand, if he was coming along the same bank as the one on which I was standing, and if I went down to the edge of the stream, the tiger, when he passed, would have the advantage not only of seeing me silhouetted against the moonlight on the water, but of himself being on more elevated ground. That could be most dangerous and disadvantageous for me if he made a charge.

He called again—about a furlong away. There was no time whatever to lose. I decided to take a chance. Most probably he was on the opposite bank of the stream and within the sanctuary.

Meanwhile my eyes had been searching desperately for a place to hide. A clump of reedgrass grew about two feet from my bank, completely surrounded by water. I knew the stream was shallow, so I ran down to the edge and silently waded the two feet, taking care not to make any splashing noises. Then I squatted low in the grass. Two or three minutes passed in dead silence. I could not see into the deep shadows cast by the trees on either bank.

Then the tiger moaned again directly opposite me—and on the very bank on which I had just been standing. He was passing at that very instant.

I counted, one-two-three-four-five, so as not to have him completely level and above me. Then I pressed the switch on the flashlight. There, hardly fifteen yards away, was his striped form.

He halted in his tracks and turned around. He was facing right side on, so that I had to take the shot behind his right shoulder. He sprang into the air and fell backwards. I fired a second and third time.

Then he realized where I was and came for me, sliding and

stumbling down the sloping bank. At a distance of barely five yards, my fourth bullet crashed through his skull.

Later, as I examined him, I marvelled at the unusual ruff of hair growing around his neck. It formed a regular mane.

Some jungle mysteries can never be solved, and one of them is why this tiger had a 'mane' at all.

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* See *Nine Man-eaters and One Rogue* (Allen & Unwin, London).

Nine

Man-eater of Pegepalyam

THIS IS NOT A COMPLETE STORY OF THE EXPLOITS AND DOWNFALL OF a man-eating tiger because the tiger of which I write is very much alive at the moment of writing. There is an official record of it having killed and eaten fourteen persons, although unofficially its tally of victims is said to amount to thirty-seven men, women and children. Of this unofficial estimate about half had actually been wholly or partially eaten, the remainder being just mauled by the animal's claws. The official record considers only individuals killed and eaten, and not those mauled. This accounts for the discrepancy between the official and unofficial death-rolls.

The interesting feature of the story I am about to tell is that I believe this tiger to be the same animal of which I wrote in an earlier book in a story entitled the 'Mauler of Rajnagara'.* When writing that account, a tiger had taken up his abode at the foot of the Dimbum escarpment, in the district of North Coimbatore, in the scrub jungle bordering the foot of the hilly plateau and about midway between Dimbum to the north, at the top of the steep ghat road up the hill, and the town of Satyamangalam on the arid plains at the foot, to the south.

The nearest village to the scrub jungles at the foot of the hills bears the name of Rajnagara, and since the tiger began his exploits against the human race by persecuting the herdsmen from this village who led their cattle to pasture in these scrub jungles, he became well

known as the tiger of Rajnagara. Moreover, he earned a particular reputation because of a peculiarity in his mode of attack—or at least it was so at the time I wrote that story. The peculiarity lay in the fact that he would rush out of cover and severely maul a herdsman by scratching him with his claws and then invariably carry off his own selection from the herd of cattle which would be milling around during the attack on the herdsman. At that time there was no authentic case of his having bitten any of the human beings he had attacked. One or two persons were listed as missing and it was presumed the tiger had devoured them, but there had been no definite evidence to corroborate that presumption. All that was known was that this tiger always mauled his victims by clawing them—not by biting.

This peculiar habit gave rise to a universal belief that he was an animal that had been wounded in the face or jaw in such a way as to prevent him from biting. At the same time it was found that he generally made a very hearty meal of the cattle he killed after mauling their herdsman, which proved that he could bite and eat perfectly well when he was so disposed. Altogether, it was a most unusual and peculiar case, which has never been satisfactorily explained or proved, although many were the ingenious explanations put forward to account for this habit.

I have related how I tried to shoot this tiger and how I failed. He was a most elusive animal. Finally I returned to my home in Bangalore, leaving the 'Mauler of Rajnagara' the undisputed winner of the first round of our encounter. I sincerely trusted the time would come when there would be an opportunity for staging a second round, when I hoped for better success.

A few friends and well-wishers have since written to me, inquiring if there is any sequel to that story. An old acquaintance of mine, Joe Kearney, went as far as to send me a cablegram from Los Angeles, California, stating he was looking forward to further developments regarding this particular tiger.

Alas, I could not satisfy the curiosity of any of them, for the 'Mauler of Rajnagara' stopped his mauling, and simply faded out shortly after my visit. We all hoped that he had become a reformed character and had perhaps turned over a new leaf with the new year. Or maybe he had just gone away to some distant jungle or even died a natural death. Time passed and the herdsmen of Rajnagara resumed their accustomed cattle grazing in the scrub jungle that surrounded their farmsteads and came home in the evenings, tired but unmauled.

And then, one evening about nine months later, the sun began to set behind the Biligirirangan range of mountains some fifty miles north of Rajnagara, as the crow flies. Its oblique rays cast elongated

shadows to the eastern side of the few huts that comprised the little hamlet of Pegepalyam, set in a clearing of the jungle, with the mountain range to its west, and the road from Dimbum to Kollegal flanking it to the east, barely two miles way. It was the time that the cows come home, and within a few furlongs of the village the local herd was wending its way along the forest tracks that led to Pegepalyam; two herdsmen, a man and a boy, were bringing up their rear.

Ravines, densely wooded, intersected the country. In the rainy season they were rushing torrents of water draining away eastwards, after cascading down the mountain range to the west. But on that balmy evening they were bone-dry, and the twitter of *bulbuls* and the rustle of several groups of 'seven-sister' birds lent an air of peace and tranquillity to the scene.

The cattle crossed one of these dips in the terrain, the adult herdsman was halfway across and the boy was on the further bank as it sloped down to the bed of the ravine. A clump of young bamboos surrounded by nodding grass-stems barred his way, and the tracks made by the cattle herd just ahead passed around it, the dust raised by the many hooves as yet unsettled. The boy followed, engrossed in his own thoughts.

The adult herdsman ahead thought he heard a hollow sound, followed by a sort of gasp and turned around to find the cause. There was nothing to be seen. The track behind him led the way to the bamboo clump. Nothing and no one was on it. The herdsman resumed his course in the wake of the herd. No doubt, the boy would come along.

Finally they neared Pegepalyam. The herdsman looked back once more. Again there was no sign of the boy. He called him by name: 'Venkat, Venkat,' he called, but there was no answer. The herdsman hesitated a while and called again, but still there was no response. Meanwhile the cattle were forging ahead towards the village, and as he did not want to leave them alone he followed them into the village. Then only did it become evident that the herdsboy had not turned up.

No serious notice was taken, as there might have been a hundred reasons for the boy's delay. But after an hour or so had passed and the boy had not appeared, the herdsman recollected that he had missed him after the track had circumvented the clump of bamboos. He also remembered the hollow gasping sound he had heard and came to the conclusion that something had happened to the boy. Perhaps he had been bitten by a snake. The thought of a man-eating tiger or panther never entered the herdsman's mind, as such a menace had never yet been heard of in the tranquil vicinity of Pegepalyam.

So he turned back and hastened to the bamboo clump. He

circumvented the bend in the track, and there, clearly and boldly superimposed over the hoof-marks of the herd of cattle and his own footprints, were the pug-marks of a tiger, the signs of a brief struggle, and a drag-mark where the killer had hauled away his victim.

And thus the man-eater of Pegepalyam came to public knowledge.

Time passed and desultory human kills were reported from scattered places, southwestwards as far as Talvadi and Talaimalai, perhaps thirty miles away; eastwards at the base of Ponnachimalai hill, and another on the banks of the Cauvery river at Alambadi, over forty miles distant; and one more in a northerly direction, barely six miles from the big town of Kollegal. That one was the latest, being that of a fifteen-year-old boy who was boldly attacked and dragged off the field where he was working at about 10.30 a.m. in blazing sunlight.

A significant fact about this man-eater is the information that was brought in on the occasion of a kill that occurred some three miles from the spot where he had taken his first victim, the herdboy of Pegepalyam. Three men were traversing a cart track that led into the jungle and had formerly been used by carts for extracting felled bamboos from the forest. Because of the activities of the man-eater, such felling operations had been almost suspended, and when people entered the jungle they only did so if it was imperative; never alone and always in broad daylight. These three men had urgent business, which accounted for their presence, their number, and the time of day which was just before two in the afternoon. They had eaten their midday meal at Pegepalyam and had almost reached their destination. They expected to be back by 3.30 p.m. at the latest.

Suddenly and without warning, a tiger sprang on to the track just ahead of the leading man. The party came to a halt, transfixed with terror. Then the tiger attacked the leading man, standing up on his hind legs and clawing his face. His companions made for the nearest tree, which was fortunately close by, and scrambled up it. Meanwhile, with commendable presence of mind and great courage, the man who had been attacked swung blindly at the tiger's head with the knife that all Sholagas carry for lopping wood or clearing a *path* through the undergrowth. The blow caught the animal on the side of its head and glanced off. The tiger roared with pain at this unexpected retaliation, and the natural cowardice with which all man-eaters appear to be imbued caused it to leave its victim and spring back into cover.

Meanwhile the other two men had succeeded in scrambling to the topmost branches of the nearby tree, whence they looked down in terror on the scene below them. Blood poured from the face and chest of their companion, welling from the deep wounds that had been inflicted by the tiger's claws. He was sitting dazedly on the ground,

numbed with shock. The men in the tree called to him: 'Brother, come and climb this tree quickly. It is unsafe to remain on the ground. The man-eater may return.'

The wounded man heard them, clambered to his feet and taking the turban from his head, began to mop up the blood that poured from the many scratches he had received. Again the men on the tree called to him, and he turned to walk towards its base with the intention of climbing. But fate had decreed that his days on this earth had run out. The man-eater's momentary cowardice had been supplanted by rage, probably caused by pain from the wound where the brave man's knife had cut through the skin on the side of his head. With a rush it was upon him, and this time a mighty blow of his foreleg across the back of the man's head broke the neck. Hardly had his body fallen to the ground than the tiger picked him up in his jaws and walked into the jungle in full view of the two men in the tree.

I visited Kollegal and Pegepalyam soon after this incident and spoke to both these men. Their accounts were unusually consistent with each other's and clear in detail. They both agreed that on both occasions when the tiger had attacked, he had done so primarily with his claws and not with his teeth.

Memory rushed back to me. Could this be that elusive tiger, the 'Mauler of Rajnagara', that had beaten me at the first encounter, grown bolder with the passage of time and become a confirmed man-eater, to appear now as the 'Man-Eater of Pegepalyam'? The evidence of the two men appeared to indicate the likelihood that this tiger was the same animal.

I took a lot of trouble in pursuing my inquiries on these lines, not only at Pegepalyam itself but at one or two of the nearer hamlets where this animal had claimed his victims, and also with the Forest Department at Kollegal. A number of the human victims had been recovered before the tiger had completely eaten them. All had been clawed, but they had also been bitten. There was no conclusive evidence that the tiger killed only by clawing, as had been the method of attack by the 'Mauler'; and in any case, the actions of clawing and biting would both take place on any carcass in the normal process of a tiger eating it.

My first visit to Pegepalyam lasted only a week, but the man-eater did not touch any of the three live-baits I offered. Nor was there any news of him whatever during that period. Duty called and there was no excuse for extending my leave. I returned to Bangalore.

Since then, as I have indicated, the man-eater has killed again—a fifteen-year-old boy in broad daylight and in an open field, with the big town of Kollegal only six miles away. This time my son, Donald, is going after him and hopes to have more luck than I did.

We would both like to know very much if the man-eater is the mauler of which I have told you, although there seems no possible way of proving this point unless Donald succeeds in finding some reason for the quite unusual habit the mauler had of attacking with his claws rather than his teeth. If he succeeds, Donald will have certainly unravelled a most intriguing jungle mystery.

And as I think these thoughts, these pages and this handwriting once again fade from sight. In imagination I see the roaring flames of a camp-fire before me, from which cascades of sparks shower fitfully into the darkness, while a thick spiral of smoke curls upwards to the sky.

It is a clear night, but few of the myriad stars that spangle the sky are visible owing to the glow from the camp-fire.

With all its vigour, the flickering light is only able to dispel the shadows for about fifteen yards around me. Beyond is blackness—intense, silent and all-pervading, like some solid substance, covering and enveloping everything—the blackness of a jungle night, a blanket of velvety gloom.

Yet more smoke curls from the bowl of my pipe as I puff at it contentedly. The smoke rises to merge with the smoke from the flames and finally disappears in the flickering, fitful radiance from the fire, with its comforting though slightly oppressive heat.

Silence broods around me, broken only by the crackle and hiss of the flames.

Then I hear it. Over the hills and far away, but drawing nearer and nearer. 'O-o-o-n-o-o-n! A-oongh! A-oongh!' It is the call of a tiger!

I have heard it so often before, and the more I hear it the more I thrill to that awful yet wonderfully melodious sound.

'Ugha-ugh! Ugh! Aungh-ha! A-oongh! O-o-n-o-o-n!' There it is again! The tiger is drawing nearer, ever nearer.

And in my imagination I like to think this will be the 'Man-eater of Pegepalyam'.

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* See *Man-eaters and Jungle Killers* (Alen & Unwin, London).

The Tiger Roars

Introduction

PREFACES ARE NOT POPULAR AND ARE SELDOM READ. AFTER ALL, A reader buys a book for what he can get out of it by way of entertainment, excitement or knowledge, as the case may be, and no explanation by the author will increase or diminish these. But before I embark on a few more tales of my adventures in the jungles of southern India, I merely wish to make a plea for their preservation, that their wild life and their beauty may survive, not only for their own sake, but that future generations may enjoy them as I have done. Time is already short.

It is the duty of the government of India, of every government in every state of India, of every sportsman who visits her forests—indeed, it is the duty of every Indian—to make a supreme effort to save the country's wild creatures from extinction.

Game and bird sanctuaries have been formed, it is true. But this is not nearly enough. Rules are printed that cannot be enforced. For one thing, the forest guards and watches are not paid enough. For another, corruption is rife.

In the state of Mysore as a whole, and also in the district of Salem belonging to Madras state, tigers and panthers are now almost extinct, wiped out by the villagers who use a poison supplied to them almost free of charge by the local governments as an insecticide to protect their crops. This poison they smear on the flesh of the kills made by tigers and panthers. These animals invariably return, eat the doctored meat and die within a few yards. So do the jackals, hyaenas, vultures and crows that follow them.

Deer continue to be slaughtered in hundreds every summer by the

poachers who wait for them with muskets over the water holes to which they must come to drink. A few rupees, or a piece of the carcase here and there, silence the officials who are paid by the governments to protect the lives of these animals.

So death stalks the wild creatures of India. Extinction, particularly in South India, will surely and certainly follow unless the governments of the various states and the people themselves wake up to the fact very soon and become realistic. It is almost too late already.

I hope that you will enjoy reading these stories a fraction as much as I have enjoyed writing them, for in doing so I have been carried back to the forest life—not only to memories of bygone days but to its enchanting sights, its myriad exotic smells, its medley of sounds, its joys and its sorrows, the exuberance of life there and its tragedy.

One

The Novice of Manchi

THE NARROW TRAIL WOUND IN AND OUT BETWEEN CLUMPS OF GIANT bamboo that rose on every side, the tall graceful fronds arching like huge bouquets of elegant, feathery blooms. It was the time when the bamboo tree was seeding, when each length of cane was crowded at its tip with tufts consisting of thousands of tiny seeds. These seeds look like ripe grains of wheat but are smaller; yet the weight of thousands of them was enough to bend each frond low to the earth, creaking and groaning under its burden as it moved with the gentle breezes passing along the jungle aisles.

The seeds fell in showers, carpeting the earth and the narrow path with a thick layer that mostly decayed, but here and there showed signs of sprouting into tiny darkgreen seedlings. This carpet felt like sawdust and had a springy consistency: it deadened the sound of anything moving over it, and of the killer that now stalked from bamboo clump to bamboo clump in search of a meal. Overhead, thousands of parakeets screeched as they hung by their feet, head downwards above the twisting trail, pecking the seeds with their razor-sharp curved beaks, deftly severing the husk from the kernel, which they crushed to a fine powder before swallowing. They were small compared with other members of the parrot family, being about twice the size of the domesticated budgerigar, but they were of many hues, ranging from emerald green to peacock blue, some with pale yellow wing-feathers and heads of rose pink or deep purple, and

others of a uniform green, ringed around the neck with a narrow collar of red and black.

A lone traveller, walking cautiously along the jungle trail, did not heed the parakeets nor the thousands of other birds, including wild pigeons and doves, that fed on the seeds of the bamboos. He gazed intently ahead and glanced furtively to either side, slowing down and even halting now and then to study a particularly dense clump of bamboo before drawing level with it. His sharp, restless eyes tried to penetrate the thick growth to see if anything was hidden there. His ears, too, were alert for sounds far different from and far more arresting than the raucous, strident screech of the parakeets. The sounds he was listening for, and dreading to hear, were the sharp crack of a bamboo branch being broken, or the deep rumble of contented feeding, or the swishing sweep of ponderous feet brushing through the carpet of seeds and decaying leaves.

The man was afraid of meeting a wild elephant or a herd of them, for there were many in this area, especially at this time of the year. But his hearing was not attuned to the approach of the killer, who first sensed and then saw him. The killer made no sound whatever, unlike the screaming, fluttering birds above or the ponderous elephants beneath, engrossed in their search for vegetable food. This killer was by no means harmless, nor was he a vegetarian. He dealt death swiftly and surely and he was at this moment very hungry indeed.

The man was a poojaree, a member of an aboriginal jungle tribe that inhabits the forests of the Salem district in southern India, and the trail he was following was the footpath that led through the forest from the hamlet of Aiyur, southwards for about ten miles to the still smaller hamlet of Manchi, nestling on the slopes of a great range of hills. The *path* ran down a valley, as also did a rocky stream, the two crossing and recrossing frequently, and sometimes running parallel to each other, while the hills towered on both sides, to east and west, in an unbroken chain of jungle. The narrow *path* was visible now and again, but disappeared as suddenly beneath the tall, bending, swaying bamboos as they moved to the gentle currents of the forest breeze.

Fine webs, almost invisible, frequently caught and tickled the face of the poojaree whose attention was wholly concentrated on the possible presence of the elephants. He brushed them off angrily with both hands, much to the annoyance of the large, long-legged, yellow-and-black-and-red spiders, six inches and more across, whose webs extended from tree to tree, secured by gossamer-like threads that were unbelievably strong, supporting a central area of a web eight or ten feet in diameter and of an intricate, finely-woven pattern. The dew had condensed on these webs and drops of moisture glistened in the sunlight that filtered through the bamboo fronds. All was still, all was

peaceful, except for the din of the feeding birds.

Keera, the poojaree, passed a dense clump of bamboo after making certain no elephant sheltered behind, but failed to see the killer in its black and rusty coat that crouched low to the earth and stared at him with malevolent, unblinking eyes.

The man heard a coughing roar twice: 'Aa-arrgh! Aa-arrgh!' Then the tiger charged.

Keera whirled around as a great shape with widely-extended jaws engulfed him. The poojaree screamed but once: 'Aiyooo-oo-oo!' He screamed no more. The birds that had ceased chattering for the moment, when the tragedy was enacted, started to screech again and from the side of the pathway came the crunch and crack of bones as the tiger began his meal.

Away on the hillside a troop of langur-monkeys had been feeding joyously, their cries of 'Whoomp! Whoomp, Whoomp!' echoing across the narrow valley. Then the sharp hearing of the langur-watchman caught the distant sound of the tiger's roars and the fainter, futile, agonized human scream. He knew that the tiger had made his kill and the hoarse, guttural, langur alarm-cry issued from his lips as he stood on his hind legs high up on a branch to discover if possible in which direction the killer was moving.

'Ha-aah! Harr! Harr!' called the watchman, over and over again. The langurs ceased playing and scampered in terror, to huddle in families on the tree-tops; while the deer and other creatures on the floor of the jungle, whose sharp ears had detected the sounds of death and the alarm of the monkeys, raced uphill and away from that valley of doom.

Time passed, and the life of the forest resumed its normal course. The birds forgot the tragedy in a matter of seconds; the monkeys and the other animals took perhaps an hour to calm down; while the poojarees in the distant hamlet of Manchi would undoubtedly have forgotten the death of their clansman Keera in a month or two had not another of them been killed a fortnight later; and, ten days after that, a third.

These things the poojarees could not forget. A dreadful fear overshadowed them. A scourge lay upon their tiny village; a man-eater had come to stay!

These people belong to a tribe that lives on the produce of the forest. They gather wild honey from giant combs built on high rocks and trees; they catch the iguana-lizard which they eat or sell for the aphrodisiac properties said to exist in its tail; they pick medicinal herbs and roots and berries which are traded as medicine; and they cut and collect bamboos, grass and the pods of the tamarind fruit, according to the season of the year. All for a pittance, less than an

ordinary person living in Europe or America would spend on feeding his pet dog. Their work, their very existence depends upon the forest, and into that jungle a fearful menace had now come. No man who left his miserable grass hut in the morning knew whether he would return that night. No woman or child was safe; for the second and third victims had been, respectively, a young girl of nine years and a pregnant bride of fourteen!

None of them did anything about it except one man, and that was my old friend and instructor in jungle-lore, Byra the Poojaree. Once before had he summoned me, in the case of the 'Marauder of Kempekarai,' about which I have written elsewhere,* and once again he asked me to come to the help of the people of Manchi.

This time Byra arrived in person rather than convey the message through another. He walked ten miles or more from Manchi to Aiyur village, and thence nine miles to Denkanikota town, whence a bus brought him to Bangalore.

From the story he told me it was clear that the three killings had taken place in comparatively quick succession, within a total of twenty-four days and all within a radius of four miles from Manchi, in the vicinity of the track leading from Aiyur to Kempekarai along the deep valley that I have elsewhere referred to as 'Spider Valley,' because of the large spiders to be found there.

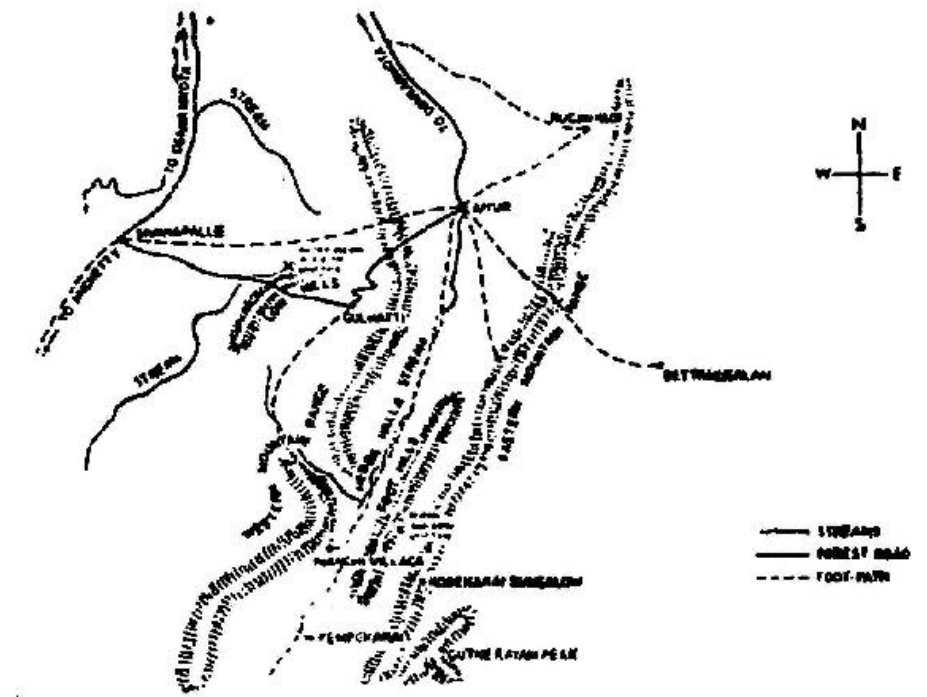
These killings indicated that the perpetrator was a comparative novice so far as man-eaters go. Either he was a young animal that had, for some reason or the other, just launched out on a career of man-eating; or he was a wounded tiger that had been almost incapacitated and was desperately hungry; or perhaps a tigress, killing merely to feed her cubs. This third alternative was extremely unlikely, as there was still a fair amount of game on the surrounding hills, while cattle were plentiful around the villages of Aiyur, Gulhati and Bettamugalam.

The facts pointed more to his being a beginner. No experienced man-eater would have killed in such quick succession or almost in the same place, as had this tiger. Veterans are far too cunning to do that. They follow a circuitous beat of many miles, covering a large tract of land, and slay at sudden and infrequent intervals, all of which habits combine to make them extremely difficult to shoot.

The course for me to follow would be to strike quickly and bag this beast before he began to learn from experience and became more cautious and adept. That caution would come as soon as the villagers tried to retaliate by shooting him or by some other means. He would be frightened then; or perhaps he would be wounded. That would make him a wiser and far more dangerous antagonist.

I knew the terrain well. For many years I had tramped that dense

bamboo jungle in the deep, narrow valley flanked by the two parallel ranges of towering hills, running north and south, closely bordering the banks of the narrow stream that also flowed southwards to merge finally into the Chinar river at a place called Sopathy. The eastern range was the loftier of the two, culminating in a high peak named Gutherayan, near which was a picturesque forest bungalow known as the Kodekarai Forest Lodge. Kempekarai hamlet lay on the slopes of the other and western range, a short distance above the little stream. The locale was almost the same as in my earlier adventure, except that the 'Marauder of Kempekarai' had been a more experienced man-eater, hunting in an area west and south of the little hamlet of that name. The present animal had so far confined his activities to the north of the settlement of Manchi and near to the Aiyur track, as I have just told you. For this reason he should be a comparatively easy proposition to bag.



Bundling Byra and my camp kit into the Studebaker, with food to last for about a week in the form of flour for *chappattis*, bread, butter, vegetables—especially potatoes—and of course tea, coffee and sugar, together with my little tent and bedroll, we set out for Denkanikota and Aiyur. From the latter place we would have to walk to Manchi and that would mean that Byra and I must carry the load for upwards of ten miles. Fortunately, it would be downhill for most of the way

going, but uphill coming back.

As far as possible, I avoid tinned foods on these excursions. I grant that they are convenient to transport. But like the villagers of India I like my food fresh and simple. Thereby I have contrived to avoid much indigestion and the other stomach troubles that appear to afflict half the sophisticated people of the world, Indians and Europeans alike.

I put my tent on Byra's head, slung the bedroll on to my back, piled the kitbag with the flour and vegetables on his, and carried the rest of the things, including the rifles, myself. I can assure you we were well weighed down, but Byra seemed to feel no inconvenience as he strode rapidly along in front of me.

The valley was hot and humid and I was bathed in perspiration. While my companion was exposed to greater risk from a wild elephant by walking in front, I was in more danger from the tiger, as man-eaters invariably attack the last person on the trail. In both cases, heavily burdened as we were, neither of us would have been able to do much about it. But I don't think we thought about elephants or tigers, being more bent upon reaching the journey's end as quickly as possible and ridding ourselves of our abominable loads.

We arrived at last, and with a sigh of relief I threw down the things I was carrying (except the rifle) just beyond the little pool of drinking water that was to figure so prominently in this adventure. The first requirement was tea—gallons of it—and I asked Byra to fill the kettle from the pool and light a fire quickly. Very soon we were pouring scalding tea down our throats and life seemed to be rosy once more.

By this time some of Byra's friends from the hamlet had gathered around us. They were all poojarees—an underfed, skinny and scantily-clad group—but all as tough as nails. The men wore little *moochas* and nothing else; the women were bare-breasted, the rest covered by threadbare saris that hung in shreds and hid nothing; the children, both boys and girls, were completely naked.

There were the usual greetings, whereupon Byra launched into a prolonged account of how he had travelled to Bangalore to bring his *dorai*, who had immediately come to their help. There was a murmur of amazement and, being of a practical turn of mind, I took advantage of the situation to despatch some of the elder boys to gather firewood from the brambles growing around the pool, and one of the men to lay in a store of water in the aluminium carrier and the water-bottle I had brought with me. These mundane but essential matters attended to, I set about munching the roasted meat, jam and buttered bread brought from home, while I asked my companions to tell me all they knew about the tiger.

I acquired little information other than the bare facts that Byra had already recounted, but there was one new item. Byra had set forth for Bangalore the previous morning. In the early afternoon of the same day, as nobody would go near the pool later than three o'clock for fear of the man-eater, four of the women had gone for water together. They had kept close to one another, relying on their numbers for safety.

The women had finished the task and were turning away when the eldest noticed a slight movement under one of the bushes bordering the jungle some fifty yards away. She looked closer. Her companions, noticing her staring at something, had all looked the same way. On the ground under that bush was the head of an enormous tiger. It was glaring at them hungrily and snarling! With screams they threw down their water-pots and bolted for the hamlet, less than 200 yards away. This time the tiger did not attack and they all got back in safety.

Two of those four women were among the group around me. One described the tiger's head as 'that big,' indicating a distance of a yard between outstretched hands. The other, who was a very matter-of-fact and comely young girl, and somewhat of a wit to boot, said it was big enough to eat all four of them and me as well. Her subtle smile after this statement was perhaps a hint that, after it was all over, I would at least be in good company inside the tiger's belly!

The news gladdened me and I noticed the gleam of satisfaction that sprang into Byra's eyes. Old hunter that he was, he knew that things would be easier for us now. If the tiger was there yesterday evening, as likely as not it would come again this evening. For all we knew, it might be watching us at that very moment.

This fresh development made me change my mind about pitching my tent near the pool. It would not fit into the plan that now came to my mind. To make camp within the hamlet itself was a far from attractive proposition, as the poojarees, who have many good attributes, do not count cleanliness among them. So I got some of the men to carry my things a little beyond the village, to where a wild jack-fruit tree was growing. Beneath its shade I pitched the small tent and put my belongings inside.

The plan that had come to me connected the tiger with the pool. Strange, indeed, that a situation of this nature should be twice destined to arise in waiting for a man-eater. In that earlier adventure at Kempekarai, just a few miles away but many years ago, I had waited all night long at a well for the 'marauder' to make an attempt to kill me. But I had waited in vain. Perhaps this tiger, which was certainly not such an experienced animal, would be more obliging and I was glad I had not made the mistake of pitching my tent, that was. more or less white in colour, within sight of the pool. Whereas the

'marauder' of years ago might have been tempted to attack the occupant, this recruit among man-eaters would surely be frightened away. Or so I reasoned, and Byra agreed with me. Events that night were to prove both of us quite wrong.

At sunset I ate an early supper, finishing the last of the roast I had brought. This time I made no tea and drank hardly any water, for experience had taught me that imbibing liquids does not help when a nightlong vigil for a man-eater is contemplated. Nature cannot be diverted from her normal practices, and the slightest fidgeting or movement on the part of the hunter will betray his presence to the tiger when he comes.

The night would be dark, for which reason I did not follow quite the same plan as I had with the 'marauder.' That had been a moonlit night and I had deliberately advertised my presence at the well by working the squeaking pulley and pretending to draw water in order to attract the tiger. But this night would be totally dark and it would be foolish to show myself openly. He would hear and see me all right; the only trouble being that I certainly would not be able to see him, and might not be able to hear him either till it was too late!

So I decided to modify the scheme a little by sitting with my back against the *babul* tree some twenty feet from the water and facing the jungle. I would sit quite still and with no movement whatever. The man-eater could hardly attack from the rear. He would have to come from in front or from either side and sitting motionless would not only help me to hear him but it would puzzle him also. He might not notice me at all; or if he did, as a novice he would be perplexed at my immobility and decide to investigate. I hoped he would make some sound in the process.

When Byra heard my plan, he told me that it was a very stupid one. The tiger might attack without making any preliminary sound. He might come from behind. I would hear nothing and see nothing in that darkness; but the man-eater would certainly see me, while he (Byra) would never see me again. For that matter, the tiger might not come this way at all. Why should he be snooping around a pool of water at dead of night? The beast knew very well that people drew water from it—but during the hours of daylight and not at night.

While he was speaking, Byra looked at me significantly, and the meaning of his glance became quite apparent. He was trying to put me off.

'I know all that,' I interrupted testily, 'but it's the only way.'

The old fellow was bent upon complicating the situation.

'I never meant that you should not sit for the tiger.' he said aggressively. 'What I meant was that you should be beside me. We should await his return together.'

'Idiot,' I interrupted, being as rude as I could, 'you have not the brains of a flea! In what way will your presence lessen the darkness? Keep out of this and let me try the plan I have in mind, at least for tonight. Tomorrow you may tell me a better one if you can think of one.'

'If you are here to listen,' he concluded pointedly.

And so, an hour before sunset, I took up my position near the little pool, my back to the *babul* tree and facing the jungle, the small stream beyond and the pathway along which we had come that morning. Inwardly, I hoped that the tiger would arrive early and see me and that in turn he would show himself as he had to the four girls, so that the episode might be closed before darkness fell. Unfortunately, the man-eater did not oblige.

The poojarees in the hamlet drew great clumps of thorns, which they had cut earlier, around the low entrances to their wattle huts, stepped gingerly between them and slipped inside. I could hear the thatched doors of the huts being barricaded from within with large stones, gathered from the stream for the purpose. These people believed in self-help, and it was evident they did not have much confidence in my ability to save them from the killer that now threatened their lives.

The sun had sunk behind the range of hills to the west, outlining their heights against a background of blue, which turned to pink and then to orange. As I was facing northeast, I could just catch brief glimpses of the beauties of this sunset. The orange deepened to blood-red, and then to crimson, green and yellow and violet and purple. An instant later it was quite dark.

While I had been watching the sunset abstractly, I had been listening to the sounds of the jungle which at all times are pleasant music to my ears, particularly at the close of the day and again at dawn. Two families of langur-monkeys, one on each of the slopes of the opposing ranges of hills, called to each other across the narrow, deep valley. 'Whoomp! Whoomp! Whoomp!' cried the males of one batch as they leapt from branch to branch, and back came the joyous notes from the other group on the hill slopes across the stream: 'Whoomp! Whoomp! Whoomp!' and 'Cheek! Cheek!' from the females and young.

Then the sounds of pleasure suddenly turned to those of fear and danger as the monkey-watchman of the more distant clan issued his staccato barking alarm cry: 'Ha-aah! Harr! Harr!' which he continued to repeat at short intervals.

The group nearer to me and on the same side of the valley fell silent, while their watchman in turn took up the note of warning, answering the more distant calls of his colleague: 'Haaah! Harr! Harr!'

The two monkey sentinels kept answering one another and my nerves tingled pleasantly in expectation.

To one accustomed to such sounds there was a wealth of difference in the timbre of the calls. The voice of the distant watchman was filled with great fear and apprehension, and it was evident that he could see the source of danger. The watchman on this side of the valley, although sounding the alarm also, was merely doing his duty to alert his tribe. His notes were flat and matter of fact. This could be detected by the fact that he called each time immediately after the other watchman, like an echo.

The calls of the two monkeys were becoming less frequent when a junglecock, somewhere on the stream, screamed suddenly in fright: 'Kuck! Kuck! Kuck!' The hen with him, hearing the cries of fright made by her mate, flew quickly away crying: 'Krr-r-r-r! Keek! Keek! Keek!' Silence and a great stillness enveloped the jungle. Then a peacock gave sign of nervousness; 'Quank! Quank! Quank!' His metallic notes broke the stillness and a moment later I could hear the distant heavy flapping of wings as he launched his weighty body into the air to reach a place of greater safety.

I knew the tiger was afoot! He had descended the opposite range of hills and been discovered by the distant langur-watchman. He had crossed the stream and disturbed the jungle fowls and the peacock. He was now coming straight towards the pool and the spot where I was seated.

It was growing darker with the passing of each minute. Would the keen eyes of the nearer langur-watchman detect him? Although the monkey had the advantage of elevation, he was comparatively far away, and no tiger—not even a beginner among man-eaters—will betray his presence unnecessarily. My doubt was settled the next instant when the watchman on the hillside to my left broke forth hysterically, fearfully: 'Ha-aah! Harr! Harr!' His cries were quick now, and independent of his distant colleague, who was still calling, but at long intervals. The note of fear was there this time—of danger and sudden death. He had seen the man-eater. And it was much closer to me than I had thought.

But of the tiger itself I could see or hear nothing. It was growing darker all the time. The bushes at the edge of the jungle before me had lost their individual outlines. They appeared as grey masses against a background of deep chocolate, turning rapidly black. A frightened hush fell over the forest, permeating it, enveloping it. The further langur-watchman had stopped calling altogether, and the nearer one barked only intermittently. He could see the tiger no longer and, having fulfilled his duty by alarming his tribe, was wondering what next to do about it.

The summits of the ranges of hills to my right and left showed themselves as ragged lines of intense blackness against a background of lesser darkness, studded by myriads of stars, flashing and blazing in a distant glory all their own. I concentrated upon one of them. It seemed to change its colours constantly, like a heavenly gem.

While staring into the blackness before me I glanced alternatively from right to left. I slowed my breathing, even tried to hold my breath altogether, in an effort to hear the very faintest of sounds. But I saw and heard nothing.

Then, with nerve-shattering abruptness, a sambar belled in the thickets just the other side of the pool: 'Dhank! Oonk! Oonk!'

The brambles crackled to his departure as he crashed his way through. The sounds of his running were lost in a few seconds, but he continued to call with alarm as he rattled over the pebbles in the stream and scrambled up the slopes of the opposing range of hills, 'Oonk! Oonk! Oonk!' came his cries as they grew fainter with the ever-increasing distance.

Grateful, indeed, was I for the warnings of my jungle friends, for they told me as unmistakably as if I had seen him with my own eyes that the tiger was within a few yards of where I was sitting. The questions were: Had he seen me? Would he see me?

I know the value of stillness in the jungle, and so I sat absolutely motionless, hardly daring to breathe. That was my only hope of escaping the tiger's immediate attention.

The seconds ticked interminably by. They appeared to pass into minutes and then into hours, though I knew that they were only seconds. Then I heard a gentle rustle to my right: the faintest of sounds, as of a leaf being turned over, and it came from a direction in line with the pool. Not a breath of air passed which could have caused that dry leaf to be moved and I knew that the author of the sound was moving through the undergrowth, hidden from my sight, and passing the pool at that moment, and that in a few moments more he would have passed behind me.

Holding my breath I listened intently, but I heard no further sound. Every instinct warned me that the tiger had now passed and was somewhere behind the bushes on the other side of the *babul* tree against which I was leaning. I was filled with an urge to turn around and face the danger, but I knew that if I did so I would certainly make some faint noise. However slight it might be, the tiger would hear it and in all probability would turn to investigate. So I overcame the urge, but turned my head around to see if the beast was creeping upon me from the rear. All I could see was the trunk of the *babul* tree only a few inches away, and beyond that darkness.

I do not know for how long I endured this suspense, but suddenly

the silence was shattered by the high-pitched, fear-laden yelping bark of a village dog in the poojaree hamlet so close behind me. The tension was relieved for the moment and I breathed more easily. Two things were evident to me now. The tiger had passed the well without detecting my presence, and had gone towards the wattle huts, obviously in search of human prey. Secondly, and beyond any doubt, it was the man-eater, as no ordinary tiger would deliberately wander near human habitation.

At that moment a perfectly silly notion entered my head. I reasoned that I could achieve no useful purpose by remaining where I was. Assuming that the man-eater did not succeed in finding a human victim, there was little chance that he would retrace his steps and pass the pool again. He might wander away in any direction, while if he did return, he would come upon me from the rear and this time he might not fail to detect my presence.

I cannot tell you, however, why I did not think of doing the most obvious thing; just sit where I was, but facing the hamlet. Instead, I made up my mind to go towards the hamlet myself, shine my torch when I came close enough, and pick up the glare of the tiger's eyes in its beam. That should afford me an easy shot.

This was a silly thing to do. Had I remained where I was, the tiger might have returned to drink at the pool, while I would have been in a fair position, behind the stem of the *babul* tree, for an easy shot. Instead, I got stealthily to my feet, and in a half-crouching position, started advancing towards the hamlet which, as I have already told you, was hardly 200 yards away.

Within a few steps I realized my foolishness, for although there was a well-defined pathway leading from the huts to the pool, in the intense darkness I could not see it and began stumbling among the bushes, making enough noise to scare away the man-eater or urge him to attack. I then thought of going back to the friendly *babul*, but again decided to advance, this time with the full knowledge that the man-eater might be five yards away, behind any bush, and I would not be able to see it.

The hysterical barking of the cur was taken up by others of its kind, and by now some half-dozen village dogs were yowling their heads off in a perfect frenzy, making enough noise to unnerve the boldest of man-eaters. It was extremely doubtful that the tiger would pursue his original intentions in the face of this din; he would either slink off or turn back. And if he did turn back, he would run into me, face to face, at any moment.

With this thought in mind, I made the second mistake of the evening. I switched on my torch—far too soon, as it turned out! As the bright beam cut through the darkness the tiger, of which I did not

catch a glimpse, true to the cowardly code of most man-eaters, roared shatteringly from somewhere in front, and I could hear him crashing into the dry scrub beyond.

There was no point in further caution. My quarry had fled and I followed the torch-beam dejectedly towards the *poojarees*' wattle huts while cursing myself repeatedly for the idiot I had been. Upon reaching the hamlet, I called softly to Byra, who emerged from one of the huts. He had been awake and had listened to the alarm-cries of the langurs at sunset, followed by those other sounds. The barking of the dogs had mystified him till the tiger had roared. Only then had he realized that the man-eater was in the village itself. He was even more surprised at finding me there also.

Quickly I related what had happened and was not comforted with Byra's brief comment, heavy with sarcasm. 'Did the *dorai* think he was following a rabbit? Perhaps the years have affected his wisdom!'

It was now just after eight o'clock, and with nothing better to do, I walked to my tent, which you will remember I had pitched under the jack-fruit tree beyond the village, lit the small hurricane lantern hanging from the ventral pole, and made myself a pot of tea. That done, I closed and fastened the flap of the tent, spread my bedding on the ground, not having burdened myself with the weight of a camp cot, extinguished the lantern because I do not like sleeping with a light burning, and was soon fast asleep.

Something awakened me with a start. In the jungle one does not wake as city folk usually do from the snug warmth of a comfortable bed, to yawn and stretch in luxury and maybe spend another five minutes contemplating with dismay the tasks that have to be performed. The forest teaches its inhabitants to sleep alert. When they awaken, they are keyed to instant action, for a second's delay may be their last.

When I opened my eyes, the vague feeling of danger that filled my mind synchronized with my groping hand and outstretched fingers as they fumbled for the rifle I had placed loaded on the ground beside me. Its comforting hardness brought assurance as I sat up to discover what had awakened me with that urgent, oppressive sense of peril.

For a second I could hear nothing, and then came the faintest of scratching sounds, which stopped and started again after a moment or two—scrape, scrape—stop—scratch, scratch—silence, and then once more. The side of the tent moved slightly and something entered from underneath; something that groped about here and there with a sinister purpose. Was it a snake?

That something encountered the edge of my bedding as it lay on the ground to my left barely a foot away, became entangled with it, and pulled away sharply, wrenching canvas and groundsheet with a

sharp, tearing noise. Claws! The man-eater was outside!

He had sensed the presence of a human being within the tent, but fortunately, with no knowledge of its flimsy structure, had tried to feel with his paw under the canvas and along the ground in the hope of reaching his prey, whom he would drag out before the victim was aware of what was happening.

A neat little plan, indeed; the only fault being that the victim was myself! Fortunate, indeed, that a premonition of terrible danger had awakened me in time.

I quickly pulled the rifle across my body as I lay on the ground, pointing the muzzle towards where I knew the tiger must be, and slid my right hand towards the trigger.

Remember, it was pitch-dark in the tent when this happened and I did not know exactly where, and in what position the tiger was standing outside. I waited for the next movement and it came again as the groping paw wrenched once more at the bedroll.

Then I pressed the trigger!

There was a deafening explosion and I scrambled to my feet, working the underlever of the .405 Winchester feverishly to fire two more shots blindly through the canvas side of my tent.

There was no sound from the tiger. Was it dead? Even so, it should have uttered a last gasp or gurgle. Was it wounded? Then surely it would have roared with pain. Had it got away? I must have missed. That could be the only explanation for the unaccountable silence.

Like a fool I had once again made an inexcusable mistake. My torch was clamped to the rifle. Why had I not switched it on for a brief moment before firing? A second or two of torchlight would have sufficed to indicate the direction from which that groping paw was coming and where the tiger was standing outside the tent. Instead I had pressed the trigger blindly in total darkness; three times, moreover, hoping to hit an animal whose whereabouts I did not know.

With torch alight, I hastily opened the tapes closing the entrance to the tent and stepped forth cautiously, to direct the torchbeam in every direction. As I had already guessed, the man-eater had escaped, nor was there the slightest sound to indicate in which direction he had fled.

My three shots had awakened the poojarees in Manchi hamlet. I could hear the voices of Byra and some others calling anxiously, inquiring if all was well. Knowing that if I did not go to them soon, the poor felows would brave the darkness and come to find out what had happened, I walked the short distance to the huts by torchlight and told a huddled, frightened group of little jungle men just what had taken place.

They insisted on coming back with me right away to see the three

bullet holes in the canvas of my tent for themselves, and the ragged edges in my bedding made by the tiger's claws. They called loudly upon God in thanks for protecting me. Then I had to leave them back at the hamlet, where Byra implored me to share the hut in which he slept for the rest of the night and not risk going back to my tent.

But this invitation I declined and marched back once again, and lay down to continue a much disturbed sleep this time with the hurricane lantern brightly burning. Sheer disgust with myself and things in general caused me to awaken long after sunrise. Voices outside greeted me, and opening the tent-flap I found all the poojarees from the hamlet squatting around in a semicircle.

The reason for their visit was a simple one. My foolish actions of the previous evening and night, and the misses I had made with the three shots I had fired, was to be explained in just two words, both of them very simple: black magic! Someone had cast a spell upon me and my rifle, so that I and the weapon did not act in coordination. Who had done it? Why? When? How? The spell would have to be removed if I hoped to kill the man-eater.

Superstition of this sort is rife amongst the simple people of the Indian forests, and large numbers of townsfolk as well. I knew that no amount of reasoning, persuasion or argument would make the poojarees think otherwise. If I ignored their belief, they would just cease cooperating with me, and then blame my failure on the spell that had been cast on me and my weapon. The shortest and easiest way was to agree.

I said, 'Yes; some misbegotten son of a … has cast a spell without doubt. Will you please remove it, if you can?'

In turn, the eldest among them replied, 'Yes, but it will cost five rupees to do this,' going on to explain that this sum covered the cost of a fowl that had to be sacrificed, and various other articles, together with the fee for performing the *pooja*.

I agreed again, paid the five rupees, and went inside the tent to snatch another hour of sleep. But disgust with myself prevented me from sleeping and I fell to thinking about the man-eater. The raucous screeching of an unfortunate chicken having its throat cut, followed by the acrid smell of smoke and incense, announced that *pooja* was being performed.

In due course Byra's voice called to me from without: '*Dorai! Dorai*! Wake up and come out. The spell is broken. Let us search for the tiger now. We will surely find him, and this time he will fall to your rifle with a single shot, for the weapon will obey your command.'

The *pooja* was not quite complete, however. The grey-beard, who was also the sorcerer of the hamlet, asked for my rifle. Laying it on the ground he made various marks in red and white, using *konkam*

powder and lime (*chunam*) respectively, on both sides of the stock. The entrails of the chicken were next looped into a circle and passed up and down the length of the barrel half-a-dozen times to the accompaniment of muttered mantras and some more incense smoke. Finally he scattered the fire in four directions, calling loudly to the tiger to come forth and be shot.

The sun was high in the sky by the time all this was over. Byra and a poojaree lad of about twenty years of age, who turned out to be the grandson of the old man who had conducted the *pooja*, then invited me to accompany them into the forest in search of the man-eater. As everybody knows, to look for a tiger in any jungle, especially a man-eater, by walking about in broad daylight is not only hopeless but foolish and a waste of time. My regard for Byra's junglecraft was boundless, but that a hunter of his experience could lend himself to this sort of foolishness surprised me.

My looks must have shown my disapproval, but Byra and the lad together urged me to waste no further time in idle talk. Evidently they had implicit faith in their sorcerer. We started, Byra leading, then me and next the boy, but as soon as we were out of sight of the hamlet I insisted on altering this marching order and exchanged places with Muthu, for that was the lad's name. If the man-eater did see us, regardless of all the hocus-pocus that had just been performed, the chances were that, like all man-eaters, this one would decide to attack the last individual in the line of march, and the unarmed youngster would not have a chance.

We walked downhill to the streambed where we cast around in the loose, dry sand for recent tracks. Difficult as it always is in such terrain to differentiate between fresh and old spoors, the two poojarees were not long in finding the tiger's tracks where he had approached the pool, with me sitting near it, the previous night a little later, and nearly a furlong away, they found his trail again, this time leading away from the village. Whether this was the spoor left by the tiger when my light near the hamlet had alarmed him, or later on after I had fired my three shots through the tent, was settled by the fact that the scooping out of the grains of sand at the toe portions of the tracks, and the marks of all four feet separately on the ground, showed that our quarry was moving very fast when he made them, with no attempt at concealment or caution. Evidently he was hurrying away after being badly frightened and this appeared to indicate we were following the trail left by the man-eater after I had fired those foolish shots. The absence of blood anywhere confirmed that he was uninjured.

We had not gone far when the trail veered abruptly to the right and led straight up the hillside on the eastern bank of the stream. I

remembered that this was the direction from which the monkey-watchman of the first batch of langurs had voiced his alarm the evening before, when the tiger was descending the hill. Now the tiger had returned the same way. Very probably his lair was in a cave somewhere higher up that hill, or perhaps some distance further away, on the slopes of the Gutherayan mountain.

With this discovery came difficulties. The ground became hard and stony once we had traversed the low-lying belt of bamboos. Clumps of spear-grass grew in between rocks and small boulders and all signs of pug-marks vanished entirely.

The two poojarees, experts though they were in woodcraft, were soon at a complete loss. They moved around in small circles, trying to pick up the trail. At times Byra, and then his young companion, would come upon a broken stem of grass or an overturned stone that showed the way the tiger had gone. But this was not for long and very soon they were forced to a halt. Beyond knowing that the tiger had gone up the hill, we had no further indication of his whereabouts.

We discussed the matter in whispers and decided to climb the hill ourselves in the vague hope of coming upon a cave of some sort in which the man-eater might be hiding. To proceed in single file meant covering only a single line of advance, so we decided to fan out slightly in order to search a wider area. Byra went about a hundred yards to my right but remained within sight, while Muthu moved off about the same distance to my left. Then the three of us started to advance cautiously.

The ground became more stony and the boulders increased in size and number, but we came across no signs of a lair. The hillock we were climbing might have been about 500 feet high, but in due course we reached the top and were able to look down the other side. Here the ground dropped sharply to a lush valley, thickly covered with bamboo, before it started to climb the next foothill. Above that hill rose the peak of the Gutherayan mountain.

At a signal from me, and maintaining the same distance apart, the three of us began the steep descent. On this side the hillock was more fertile. There were fewer rocks and boulders, larger and taller clumps of grass, and even bushes and stunted trees that increased in number till we had reached the region of bamboos, where we found ourselves in a green twilit valley beneath the towering fronds. Now we could no longer see each other, and very soon I felt that my companions, unarmed as they were, had exposed themselves to terrible risk, for I could not help them should the tiger decide to attack. The bamboos and heavy jungle afforded ample cover and even the keen eyes of the two aborigines could not possibly penetrate the green wall that enveloped the three of us.

It was as if this thought gave rise to action, for just then I heard a shrill scream of terror from the poojaree boy, who was about a hundred yards to my left. This was followed by short, sharp 'woofs' as the tiger charged him. The roars ended abruptly when Byra, to my right, gave voice to a volley of shouts. Knowing he was doing this in an attempt to frighten off the attacker I added my yells to his as I turned and crashed towards the spot from which the scream and the roars had come.

Short as the distance was, Byra had caught up with me before we found the lad. He was lying on his face just beyond a pile of boulders and long grass, the back of his skull crushed in, while deep fang marks at the base of the neck and over the right shoulder showed where the tiger had first bitten him before smashing his skull with a stroke of the paw. Possibly the man-eater had been seized by a mixture of fear and rage at hearing our shouts, intended, as I have told you, to save the boy's life. But in this instance they had sealed his fate, for the tiger had killed him.

The flattened grass on the opposite side of the pile of boulders showed where the man-eater had been hiding, waiting till the lad had passed before pouncing upon him from behind. We turned the young poojaree over and were confronted by a ghastly spectacle. The force of the blow upon the back of his head had caused the eyeballs to protrude, while the boy had bitten through his own tongue so that the end hung loosely from his mouth, held by a shred of flesh. Blood seeped into the sand where it was forming a little pool.

Shaken and feeling sick, I turned to my companion. His jet-black face had turned to an ashen hue and his features worked violently with emotion. But not a word did he say. Nor did I. What was there to say? We—and most certainly I—could only blame ourselves for our carelessness and for exposing this unarmed youth to the fiendish cunningness of the tiger.

My watch showed it was just eleven o'clock and the sun beat mercilessly down upon the scene.

It took some minutes to recover from the shock.

Then I said, 'You were so sure that we would kill the tiger after that silly *pooja*. Instead, he has slain one of us!'

Byra did not answer at once. When he spoke there was resentment in his tone. 'The sorcerer should have sacrificed a cock. Instead, he slew a hen, for the hen cost him a rupee less. But it has cost his grandson his life!'

I was scarcely listening. An idea had flashed into my mind. I walked through the long grass to the boulders, stepped on one, and looked back at the body. Barely ten yards! The distance was almost too close. There were only four boulders lying haphazardly together,

and the largest of them, the one on which I stood, was about three feet high. The others were much smaller.

The idea then became a definite plan. Since there were already some stones on the spot, would the tiger notice if a few more were added? Perhaps not, provided the extra stones were so placed as not to give rise to undue suspicion.

I turned to Byra and said, 'The night will be dark and this will tempt the devil we are after to return to his kill early, provided we leave the body where it is. For he is hungry, remember. He was hungry last night. That was why he went so boldly to the huts at Manchi. And he has not eaten since then. Tonight he will be very hungry indeed. So we will bring some more boulders to add to these four and make a hide in which I will sit. At this close range, when my torchlight falls upon him, I cannot miss.'

'*Dorai* you're completely mad,' commented the old hunter. 'As soon as he sees the hide he' 11 suspect something. Perhaps he may go away. Maybe not! If he should spring over the boulders, he will be on top of you before you know where you are.'

'Besides,' he continued, 'it's our duty to return to Manchi and tell that rascally grandfather what has happened to the poor boy. Then the men from the village will come and bear his body away and burn it tonight. Thus his soul will gain peace. If we leave his remains here to be eaten by the tiger, and not burn them, the soul will wander in these jungles and torment us for failing to do our duty.'

The tiger will not eat them,' I cut in sharply, 'for I will be among the boulders to prevent him. That I promise you. Is this not a good chance to be avenged upon this devil? If I succeed in slaying him tonight, will I not save many lives, perhaps your own among them? As a hunter yourself, don't you agree it would be foolish for us to lose such a golden opportunity?'

Byra did not reply. I could feel him weakening. Finally he looked at me and there was complete innocence in his expression.

'We've searched everywhere and cannot find the body, *dorai*. Let's go back now and inform the others. Tomorrow morning we will search again. Tonight you will sit at the side of some jungle *path* to await the tiger, should he pass by, while I will perch like a monkey on a tree, out of sight but not out of hearing, in case you should need my help.'

Thus Byra settled the issue with his conscience and we got to work in right earnest.

In order not to arouse the tiger's suspicion, we moved quite 200 yards away to another area strewn with boulders, big and small. Together we carried half a dozen of the larger ones, one at a time, and placed them in a rough circle with the four boulders that were already

there. On this foundation we placed smaller stones, so that in time we had built a circular wall maybe three feet high. I realized it would not do to make this wall any higher, for the additional safety thus gained would be of no avail should the tiger become suspicious on seeing a construction before him that had not been there on his last visit.

Next, into crevices between the stones we stuck handfuls of the tough grass which we tore from tufts and clumps growing some distance away. All this took a long time and was strenuous work, for you must realize the sun beat down on us mercilessly, and the stones and the grass had to be brought from a distance to avoid creating suspicion.

When we left Manchi that morning, boosted by the sorcerer's confidence that we would kill the tiger, I had brought only my rifle and no torch or water-bottle. It would be dangerous to send Byra back alone to fetch these things. Either we would both have to go back, or I could go myself and leave the poojaree up a tree, and if I did that there was always the chance that the tiger might return during my absence and carry away the cadaver of the. unfortunate boy to some more remote spot where it would be difficult for us to find it again.

After considering all these factors in whispers, we decided that we had no choice but to take up our positions straight away. I within the small three-foot fort we had constructed and Byra on some tree within hearing distance, and remain in our places till next morning, in the hope that the man-eater would remember his human victim and come back for a meal. We could only hope that the tiger had not been in hiding within hearing distance all this while, for then our movements during the past three hours would undoubtedly have alarmed him and he would have moved off long ago, not to return. Our only chance of success lay in the hope that he might have gone higher up the hill in search of water and had not heard us. It was most unlikely that he had returned to the stream in the valley for, as I have told you, it was quite dry at this time of the year.

We cast around in a wide circle for a suitable tree for Byra, and came upon one about half-a-furlong away, slightly lower down the hill from the spot where the boy had been killed. This was a fairly large tamarind and offered ample scope for the old poojaree to shelter in comfortably till I called him next morning.

It was two-fifteen in the afternoon, perhaps the hottest time of day, when Byra climbed the tamarind after earnestly advising me to be careful and not fall asleep at any cost. Leaving him there, I returned to my little fort, scrambled over the scorching stones we had placed there to form the wall, and tried to settle down inside. I at once encountered the first difficulty. The ground was so hot that I could not sit on it, but had to remain crouched on my haunches. Apart from

being a painful and uncomfortable posture, the wall was not high enough for it. My head showed above the top and would be easily seen from outside, so I had to sit with head bowed to try to conceal myself.

It did not take me long to realize that such a position was absurd and dangerous, for I would not be able to see the tiger should he creep upon me.

I got out of the hide then, walked some distance away, and plucked several handfuls of tough grass stems which I stuck very closely together into the *pugaree* of my 'Gurkha' hat. This took a little time, but I was satisfied with the task eventually. When seen from a distance, there was no hat to be seen, only another clump of grass.

Donning the hat, I returned within my fort of stones, crouched once more on my haunches and attempted to remain motionless. I was just able to look over the rim of the rocks in a half-circle, before and to both sides of me, and by turning my head ever so slowly to right and left, I could even see behind. This movement would not be very noticeable, I felt, as the whole 'clump' of grass on my hat would turn with it and might be mistaken by the tiger for the effect of the hot breeze that was blowing from the valley and the streambed towards the hill-tops and was rippling the bowed heads of the dried grass in waves from time to time.

I soon found that I could not remain still in that crouching posture for very long. My ankles became painful and the calves of my legs became numb. I had to move this way and that, slowly and a little at a time, till after four o'clock, when the earth cooled sufficiently to allow me to sit down.

Up to this time the surroundings had been abnormally silent. Not an animal or bird had indicated its presence by sight or sound. All creation—and no doubt the tiger, too—was sheltering from the devastating heat. Only twice had I seen movement, firstly when a giant iguana lizard attempted to cross, caught sight of Muthu's body on the ground, turned abruptly and scrambled away, and later, when a small python, hanging unnoticed head downwards from a low tree, had dropped upon a passing ground squirrel to crush it to death. I had seen the squirrel, but had not noticed the snake till I saw the python's coils squirming in the grass and heard the squeaks of the victim being crushed to death.

There was a marked cooling of the air by five o'clock and this reminded me that I had drunk no water since morning. There was not a drop to drink anyhow, and worst of all, I would have to remain thirsty till I returned to Manchi the following morning—a truly formidable thought!

A partridge on the hillside to my left broke the long silence at last

'Kee-kok-kik! Kee-kok-kok! Kee-kok-kok!' he called in challenge and within minutes came the acceptance to a fight from another male bird slightly higher up the hill: 'Kee-kok-kok! Kee-kok-kok! Kee-kok-kok!'

The two partridges challenged each other frequently as they drew closer together, hastening to the fray, till finally they met. Then with hysterical cries of 'Kok! Kok! Kok!', the duel started in earnest. Unfortunately I could not see the birds but could picture the battle in my imagination for the ten minutes or so that it lasted, before one of the contestants gave way to the superior prowess and stamina of his adversary. He flew helter-skelter from the scene of battle. I was just able to glimpse his brown form sailing precipitately downhill to safety, while the other bird remained to voice the victory cry 'Kee-kok-kok! Kee-kok-kok! Kee-kok-kik!' once again.

The battle of the partridges had served to while away the time. It was now 5-40 p.m. and the calls of junglecocks from the streambed in the valley rose to announce the advent of eventide. 'Wheew! Kuck-kya-kya-kuckm!' they crowed from down below, to be answered by other cocks on the hillsides in all directions. Occasionally a peafowl voiced its meowing cry, while *bulbuls* in hundreds, on bushes and thickets, joined in the general symphony of calls that remain indelible in the memory of all that have known these beautiful jungles.

But it would not do for me to pay too much heed to these sounds much as I enjoyed hearing them. I would have to remain keenly alert from now onwards, for with nightfall drawing near, the man-eater would remember his victim and might decide to return at any moment. At this time the two tribes of langur-monkeys, one of them on the hilltop above me and the other somewhere on the adjacent hill across the stream, started their eventide gambols, frolicking among themselves and calling boldly to each other across the intervening valley. 'Whoomp! Whoomp! Whoomp!' they screamed as they leaped from branch to branch. I could not see them from where I was sitting, but could hear the bang and thud of their bodies as they landed heavily among the branches of the trees.

I was grateful for the presence of the langur-monkeys. I knew that each tribe would have its own watchman, sitting alert on a tree-top, serious, silent and intently scanning the ground below for movement and danger.

The sun set behind the range of hills at my back and the shades of evening spread rapidly around me. The grasses and bushes and boulders that had been so clear all this while now became hazy and blurred. Distances lost their perspective. In a few moments there was no background to be seen at all; just the few indistinct bushes that grew in my immediate vicinity. All else was a dark-grey void, rapidly turning to chocolate and then to blackness. Muthu's body, only ten

yards away, lost its shape and became merely a darker heap upon the rapidly darkening ground.

There was a whirring flutter of movement behind my head that startled me, accompanied by high-pitched, creaking squeaks. The long-eared bat, intent on its search for insects, had thought there might be a few in the clump of grass adorning my hat and had come to investigate. Softly a nightjar fluttered on to one of the stones forming my rampart. It was so close that by stretching out my hand I could have caught it, and I was pleased with myself at having sat so still, for I had even deceived this bird into not noticing my presence. The nightjar snuggled low on the hot rock, puffed out its throat with air, and voiced its usual cry:

'Chuck! Chuck! Chuck! Chuck! Chuckoooooo!'

Then it noticed poor Muthu. Suddenly it took fright, fluttered both its wings like a giant moth, and sailed into the heavy air and out of sight. A little later I could hear it again, this time from far away, where the bird thought it was quite safe, voicing its jerky call.

Now I could no longer see the bushes, the grasses, the stones, nor even poor Muthu. A curtain of blackness closed over me with the falling of night. The stars that to a certain extent illumine the darkness in a jungle were few this night as I raised my eyes heavenwards in search of them. The steely blue-black of the usual night sky was covered by a ruffled blanket of small, broken, cirrocumuli clouds, resembling the ringlets of wool on a sheepskin. They stretched between the two ranges of hills and all but hid the stars from sight.

It was a perfect night for the man-eater to discover my presence and add me to his menu without my ever being aware of his nearness. To see him in such darkness was impossible, and I was entirely at his mercy. Suddenly I became very frightened and began to shiver. Why had I been so foolhardy as to place myself in this predicament by not listening to the old Poojaree's experienced advice? I felt like shouting to Byra. I felt like getting up and dashing away from this horrid place to the faraway tamarind tree in which I knew my friend, the jungle man, was sheltering. A feeling of being closed in, of suffocation, of claustrophobia, gripped me. Panic all but overwhelmed me and the sweat of nervous terror streamed down my face. In the distance, a horned-owl hooted dismally: 'Whoo! Whoooo! Whoo! Whoooo! Whoo! Whoooo!'

At that moment the calm of the night was shattered by the dying scream of a sambar stag from the stream bed down in the valley.

'Aar-aar-aarrhh-aaarrhh!' it shrieked in its agony, and once again 'Aaahhh-gggrrrhhh!' Then there was silence.

I knew the animal that was being done to death at that moment was a stag, for a doe would have uttered a cry of far higher pitch,

while the shriek of a spotted deer would have been quite different. Three possible foes could be killing that stag; a pack of wild dogs, a panther or a tiger. I decided against the dogs; a pack would have raised its hunting calls and I would have heard them long ago. Besides, these dogs do not hunt on dark nights. So the slayer was either a large panther of the tendu variety, or a tiger. Nothing else could be killing an animal as big as a sambar stag. Even a tendu would have all its work cut out to bring down a victim of that size.

Very likely the killer was a tiger after all. But was it the man-eater, who was reputed to eat only human flesh? Or was it some ordinary wandering tiger who happened to be in the vicinity too? I knew that the man-eater could not subsist on human flesh alone. His kills were too few and far between. He must be devouring animals as well, and I remembered he was very hungry that night, not having eaten for some time. Very likely it was he who had attacked the stag after all. Perhaps he had been returning for Muthu and had come upon the deer by chance.

The sambar was dead now and all sounds had ceased. The tiger would spend the rest of the night feeding on this new victim and would not come near the body of the poojaree lad. My vigil would have been in vain. The thought was very mortifying indeed.

Mixed feelings of relief from immediate danger, and sheer disgust with myself at my cowardice, set in when I realized that only a few moments earlier I had been trembling, scared out of my wits at nothing but the darkness and the thought of the man-eater's proximity.

I knew that the old poojaree, too, must have heard the sambar's death-scream. Like me, he would wonder if the killer was the man-eater or some other animal. I wondered what conclusion he had reached. The slaying of the sambar had brought to an end the nervous tension under which I had been labouring. I was quite calm now as I wondered over and over again whether the man-eater would return or not.

For the next half-hour or so the forest was hushed and strangely silent. It was as if its denizens were aware that danger lurked by the streambed, and that sudden and violent death awaited any of them who betrayed his presence. I glanced at my watch. It was not yet ten o'clock. I had many hours of tiring vigil before me.

After that the jungle gradually came to life again. I could hear the stealthy nibbling of grass by a barking-deer a few yards to my right. Down below, on the banks of the stream, an elephant was breaking bamboos.

As the heated air from the valley started to rise, the colder air from the hilltops rushed down to take its place. This caused fitful gusts of

breeze to blow and carried to the munching barking-deer the smell of Muthu's body that was now beginning to make itself felt. There was a sudden noise as the little animal dashed away for a few yards. Then it came to a halt to voice its barking alarm-cry: 'Kharr! Kharr! Kharr! Kharr!'

The barks came at intervals of a few minutes. It seemed incredible that such a small animal could make such a loud noise. I knew that the call of a barking-deer can be heard for over a mile on a still night.

Shortly afterwards the elephant in the valley, in his hunt for fresh bamboo-shoots, moved upstream. This brought him to the remains of the stag that had been killed a short while earlier. Probably the killer, panther or tiger, was still there, feeding on his prey. Whatever it was, the elephant became excited and began to trumpet repeatedly, the brassy scream of each note disturbing the silence of the forest.

And then I heard it clearly. 'Wr-aagh! Wrr-aagh!'—the roars of an angry tiger coming from the same direction. The elephant screamed again and again, and the tiger roared its defiance in between, answer for answer. I could imagine the scene. The tiger had been feeding, or perhaps just sleeping by the sambar's remains, when the elephant had blundered upon him. Would the encounter develop into a fight, or would one or other of the animals lose its nerve and retreat?

The screams of the elephant began to change in timbre. The high-pitched note of fear gave place to the longer, slightly lower note of anger. I could make out that the animal was a bull. He resented the tiger's presence amongst the bamboos, which he no doubt regarded as his own property, and was rapidly losing his temper.

What would the tiger do? The matter was not left in doubt for long. He suddenly lost his nerve and decided to give way to the irate elephant, even if it meant abandoning his kill. There was sudden silence when the tiger beat a retreat, while the bull elephant, finding his bluster had succeeded in driving away the foe, slowly regained his composure and ceased to trumpet.

Silence once again descended upon the forest. The fleecy clouds that had been hiding the stars since sunset had disappeared about an hour before, and I could now see the dark form that was Muthu, and the nearer bushes and grasses, reasonably clearly in the light of the stars. Now at least I might be able to see the man-eater should he decide to return to Muthu's body. This caused me to wonder again whether the tiger that had just had that altercation with the elephant was the man-eater or not. His display of cowardice tended to offer an affirmative answer.

My thoughts were disturbed at that instant by a growl! I heard it only once and so I could not quite locate the sound or where it had come from, but it was an unmistakable growl. I fancied it had come

from somewhere behind me and lower down the hillside, but I was not quite sure.

As quietly as possible, I turned my body a few inches to the left, so as to be able to observe whether anything was approaching from that direction, but I could still see the smudge that was Muthu, by looking to my right.

And then I heard it again: another growl, louder and closer this time. There was now no doubt whatever: the tiger was coming up the hill, he was coming in my direction.

I could not help smiling to myself as I thought of the great service that the elephant had done me in driving the tiger from his kill. The angry tiger had now been forced to remember that he had made another kill, one of those tasty human beings, earlier that afternoon and higher up the hill. So he was returning to it, voicing his anger all the while against the elephant that had disturbed him.

My luck had been stupendous. Not only was the tiger advertising his presence, which was much in my favour on a dark night, but the bad temper he was displaying, and his smouldering resentment against the elephant, would prevent him from being too cautious when he eventually reached poor Muthu. After all, perhaps he would not discover my presence. I was elated at the thought.

Twice more the tiger growled. Then I dimly saw a long, dark ill-defined shape to my left and a little below me. It seemed to move. It disappeared completely. Then it appeared again, this time much closer. It was certainly moving towards me.

The tiger growled again Apparently he was still thinking of the elephant and could not get him out of mind. The throaty, rasping note came from the long, moving object that was rapidly approaching me.

The dark shadow disappeared behind an intervening bush. A few seconds later the slinking shape moved dimly from left to right, and came to a halt over Muthu, just ten yards away. It had not even glanced at the little stone fort that Byra and I had so painstakingly constructed.

The tiger was in such a vile temper that he voiced a series of loud growls when he bit savagely into the poojaree lad's dead body and began to worry the carcase. His recent undignified retreat before the bull elephant, and the fact that he had to abandon his sambar kill, was annoying him intensely. He felt he had to vent his spleen on something.

Only now did I realize how difficult was the task that lay before me. I had to kill the tiger with my first shot, or at least cripple it effectively so that it would not turn upon me. My quarry was a mere ten yards away, but I could just see it as a blur. I had no torch, no nightsight, no white card as an index, that we read about so often, to

fit to the sights of a rifle to make night shooting easy. My old .405 did not even have a phosphorescent foresight.

I realized I would have to act quickly while the tiger was still venting its wrath upon poor Muthu's remains. Once it became calmer and settled down to feed, it would notice any slight movement of my rifle and attack me. In fact, if it had eaten enough of the sambar it might just pass on, to return later in the night when it became hungry again, or perhaps not return at all.

Very cautiously I raised the stock of the .405 to my shoulder, taking the greatest care not to knock the barrel against any of the stones we had erected. Holding it firmly, I pointed the barrel as best I could at the front portion of the dark shape that was the tiger.

I knew there was no possibility of picking my shot of firing at some vital place. I would have to take a chance. Perhaps I would miss altogether. Very likely I would just wound the tiger superficially and it would then turn and attack me. There was a hundred-to-one-chance that I would kill it with my first shot.

Steadying my hand and holding my breath, I pressed the trigger.

Pandemonium broke loose as the sharp report of the rifle thundered out and echoed against the opposing range of hills. The tiger roared lustily. Fortunately it had been facing away from me when I fired. Not knowing whence the shot had come, it imagined the foe was somewhere in front and sprang upon the nearest bush and began to tear it to shreds. As I feared would happen, I realized I had only wounded the tiger. It had been in a bad temper then. Now it was furious.

And then I made a mistake. Had I done nothing, the tiger would have reduced the bush to nothing and probably have gone away after that, without discovering my presence. But I fired again at its dark shape.

After that the tiger's behaviour was fearsome. Hit a second time, it catapulted itself into the air, fell to earth with a thud, and then began grubbing around in a circle. Evidently the spine was broken, for the animal appeared to be unable to stand upright. But this time it knew where its attacker was concealed, and the grubbing circle it was taking brought it directly down upon me.

Scrambling to my feet, I fired my third shot into its head at a range of scarcely two yards. Then I vaulted over the stone parapet by using my hands and promptly fell down the other side. My feet pricked as if there were a thousand needles in each, for I had been sitting crosslegged for some eleven hours and they were numbed.

Fortunately the tiger remained on the other side of the stones. A dreadful bubbling, gurgling sound was coming from it, showing that the animal was still alive but grievously hurt and probably dying.

I scrambled to my knees as the blood flowed back to my legs and peeped cautiously over the intervening boulder. The tiger lay on the other side, twitching and gasping and gurgling. My fourth shot ended its suffering.

When the noise died away, I could hear Byra calling to me frantically, asking if all was well. I answered him in the affirmative and told him to come along. A few minutes later my friend appeared out of the darkness and I told him the whole story. On the streambed the elephant trumpeted again.

Unerringly Byra led me through the dark jungle back to Manchi hamlet. There, for the second time, I repeated all that had happened. The inhabitants turned out to the last child, brought lights and returned with us to bring in the bodies of Muthu and the tiger.

My first shot had entered the stomach. My second had smashed the spine high up at the shoulder. It was this second shot that had anchored the tiger and prevented it from escaping. As we had anticipated the man-eater turned out to be a young animal, and this accounted for his inexperienced, erratic ways. The poojarees asked why we had used the body of Muthu as a bait. We asked them why they entertained a sorcerer of such poor calibre in their midst. We also reminded them we had rid them of the man-eater. The end justified the means.

To this they said nothing.

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* See *Man-eaters and Jungle Killers*, Chapter 1.

Two

The Lame Horror of Peddacheruvu

IF YOU WERE TO TRAVEL FROM GUNTAKAL BY THE METRE-GAUGE railway eastwards towards the city of Bezwada, now known as Vijayawada, you would traverse some of the best-known and densest forests of the state of Andhra Pradesh soon after leaving Dronachellam Junction, when you pass Nandyal and go through the stations of Basavapuram, Chelima, Bogoda and Diguvametta.

The forests on either side of the track are the only areas in southern India where the once-numerous giant antelope, known as the nilgai or blue bull, are still to be found. They are especially numerous in the jungles around the Forest department Rest House at a place named Chinnamantralamanna. These great animals, which once abounded everywhere, are now extinct in all the other forests of the South.

In addition to the blue bull, the others found in the Indian subcontinent are numerous here, together with huge sounders of wild pig, and all these animals in turn attract tigers and panthers who are always to be found where sufficient food is available. But when this natural food becomes scarce for any reason, the carnivora are forced to prey on the herds of cattle, sheep and goats tended by the herdsmen who live on the outskirts of the villages. Then, and only then, do they fall foul of the men who attend the herds, and who naturally endeavour to drive away the marauders with spears, traps,

bullets and other devices. Tigers and panthers are wounded or hurt in other ways too. This incapacitates them for normal hunting, and in time they take to man-eating as the easiest way of appeasing hunger.

In the course of years many man-eaters have appeared in these areas. I have already told of one of them that haunted the railway tracks between some of the stations I have named* and what follows is the story of another that appeared in the same general locality, but some miles to the north.

To reach the spot, you do not alight from the train at Diguvametta, but travel another forty miles to Markapur Road. You detrain there and go by road in a northerly direction for another forty miles. The road winds down a picturesque ghat to an insignificant place known as Srisailam, overlooking the winding course of the Kistna river that formerly separated the Madras Presidency in the south from the dominions of the Nizam of Hyderabad in the north. The British have now gone, and so also have the Nizam's dominions, all these areas having been brought within the extensive state of Andhra Pradesh, the second largest in India, while Srisailam, hitherto merely the site of a large temple and of only religious significance, is becoming famous as the centre of a great twin project involving an irrigation and electricity scheme.

In former years, when conditions were undisturbed, this road from a point about twenty miles from Markapur Road railway station as far as the Kistna river was covered with the type of forest that tigers delight in—not too dense and not too thorny—with sufficient high grass and low trees to afford cover for themselves and grazing and shelter for the wild deer and pig that form their natural diet. Low, rolling hills with interesting streams provided plenty of water for them in even the hottest weather, while the tiny jungle-ticks that are the scourge of the forests further south, and the voracious leeches of the Western Ghats, both of them hateful to all carnivora who cannot rid themselves of these pests, seem to be entirely absent. At least the leeches are, while the ticks appear only after the rains and then in insignificant numbers.

So tigers and panthers, particularly the former, were plentiful. They fed on the Nilgai and the deer, and sportsmen did not visit the area very often. Elephants and bison strangely enough, are entirely absent from these jungles. The rare blue bull makes up for them in a way, but as it is protected and there is a total prohibition against shooting them, these areas have never been popular with tourists or sportsmen. The climate, too, is difficult: hot in winter and savagely hot in summer.

Another factor that has saved the carnivora to a large extent is the paucity of motorable tracks into the interior. If you want to travel

away from the main road, you either walk or travel by bullock-cart. But all this made the jungles of Srisailam very pleasant to me. In their fastnesses I could lose myself, away from the crowd.

There is a village named Peddacheruvu situated to the west of the road from Markapur to Srisailam. To reach it you go by bullock cart through eighteen miles of forest where you generally do not meet another human being. Peddacheruvu is a small village, and to the south of it lies a pretty lake. The bullock-cart track passes this lake and wends southwards for a few miles more till it reaches a hill. At an impossible gradient the track descends this hill to the hamlet of Rollapenta, where it meets another main road leading from the village of Doranala to the town of Atmakur. Further south yet is the Rest House of Chinnamantralamanna, where the Nilgai abound.

The lake I have just told you about is ringed by the jungle, and in this jungle many tigers are to be found. So many, in fact, that they have killed and eaten all the panthers that at one time lived there too. From November to January each year, during the mating season, after sunset and often during the daylight hours too, you can hear the moaning call of a tigress seeking her mate, and sometimes the awful din of tigers fighting for the female whose roars have summoned them from afar.

I have told you in earlier stories that the natural food of tigers and panthers is the wild game of the forest, and when these become scarce, the herds of domestic cattle and goats that are taken out to graze. Man-eating is invariably the result of a tiger or panther becoming unable to hunt its normal food by some injury caused, in every case in my experience except the one I am going to tell you about, by a wound inflicted by man. Generally it is a gunshot or rifle wound, or injury brought about when escaping from a spring trap, when the animal has had to tear itself free from the teeth of the steel jaws that have fastened on its face or foot.

But in the case of the man-eater of Peddacheruvu it was none of these things. For after I shot him I found that this tiger, well past his prime, had been involved in a fight with another tiger. He had lost an eye and an ear as the result—both on the right side, where his adversary had gripped him—and the tendons of his right foreleg had been chewed through and through, causing him to drag that limb as he walked and to leave a distinct trail behind him. These disabilities, together with his advancing years, had prevented this animal from being able to kill his normal prey. A tiger's forepaws, and particularly the right one, are essential to him in normal attack, for with them he grips his victim while he bites the neck or throat, causing the animal to topple over and break its neck by its own weight. With his right foot maimed, this tiger could not hold any animal larger than a

mouse-deer. So he went through months of starvation while his wounds healed, and then he took to killing and eating every human being that came his way, for he found them slow in movement and quite helpless to resist him, even with his handicaps.

The people of Peddacheruvu told me later that they had heard a tigress moaning for some days. That was when this story really began.

It was just before Christmas and the mating season. Two tigers had begun to fight for her. The quarrel had started at sunset and had lasted half the night. Both contestants had evidently been badly hurt, for one of them had come down to drink water at the edge of the lake, where he had left a pool of blood on the muddy edge. The other had crossed the sandy track leading from Peddacheruvu to Rollapenta, on the Doronala-Atmakur road. The soft earth showed a distinct blood trail and three sets of pug-marks, while a faint furrow in the sand showed that the animal had been dragging one of his limbs and could not put his weight on it.

Time passed, and then a sheep or goat here or a village dog there disappeared, while as often as not the pug-marks of the 'limping tiger,' as he came to be known, showed that this contestant at least had survived the epic fight.

The older men in the village shook their heads and conferred in whispers. Some of them had heard of such cases before. A few had actually seen them. But they all knew that the taking of the sheep, the goats and particularly the village curs, meant that a man-eating tiger was in the making. For tigers disdain such food and will only stoop to kill and eat such insignificant prey when they are on the verge of starvation, or when they are unable, for some good reason, to kill anything bigger.

The first human victim was taken very soon after that, and the old men wagged their heads and their tongues yet more. He was a cartman and had been returning to the village in the evening with his cart laden with bamboos that had been cut in a valley five miles away. The cart track skirted the lake I have told you about, and here the man had stopped to water his bulls without unyoking them, for his cart was too heavily laden and it would have been impossible for him to re-yoke them again single-handed.

Perhaps just before or after watering his animals, the man had got down from his cart to drink himself. That was when the 'limping tiger' took him.

The bulls, terrified at the sight of the tiger, had dashed madly away, dragging the laden cart behind them. They had not kept to the road, as a result of which the cart had fallen down an incline, the weight of the bamboos dragging the two unfortunate bulls with it. One had broken its thigh and the bone, protruding through the outer

skin, had stuck into its belly, while the cart lay on top of the animal, effectively anchoring it. The second bull had been more lucky. The yoke had slipped off its neck, leaving the animal free to dash to the village. Its arrival there had caused consternation, but as night had fallen already nobody would listen to the pleadings of the cartman's wife and three children that the men should form a search-party with lanterns to look for the breadwinner.

The sun was already up next day when the able-bodied men of the hamlet, two of them armed with matchlocks and the rest with spears and sticks, eventually left the village. Very soon they came upon the capsized cart, and the unfortunate bull with the broken thigh. Of the owner there was no trace.

They followed the tracks of the cart to the edge of the pool and there they saw in the mud the prints left by the limping tiger. Some of the searchers had wanted to look for the remains of the cartman, but the two individuals armed with matchlocks had become faint-hearted. One said his weapon was useless and would not fire. The other, more truthful, admitted he was too afraid. As a result the whole party returned to the village and the remains of the cartman were never found.

The second victim was a woman. This incident also took place in the evening, but at a spot within a hundred yards of the village where she had taken her water-pot to the community well. No jungle grew there, but nearby was a grove of peepul trees which, in turn, adjoined a coconut plantation. A thick hedge enclosed this plantation, and on the further side was wasteland, covered with scrub and grass. The jungle proper began more than half a mile away. The well was at a spot where no tiger had ever been known to come within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, and he was well over a hundred years old.

But the limping tiger came that evening. Two other women saw him in the act of carrying away his victim when she screamed. They turned around at the sound and were dumbfounded to see a great tiger, with a distinct limp, dragging the woman by her shoulder and moving at a fast pace towards the peepul trees. They had waited no longer and fled screaming to the village.

Human kills had followed in rapid succession after that, and one day I received a letter from an old friend of mine, a Telugu Indian gentleman named Byanna, who lived near the Markapur Road railway station, telling me of the goings-on at Peddacheruvu village and asking me to come and shoot the tiger. Moreover, Byanna offered to accompany me in order to render what assistance he could, and suggested I should travel by train to Markapur Road, from where he would take me in his Land Rover to our destination.

Such a summon is impossible to resist, so I sent Byanna a telegram

informing him I was leaving by express the following night. The next forenoon found us together on the platform of Markapur Road railway station.

Mr Byanna is meticulous, and looking after a guest is to him a matter of great importance, so important that at times it is all rather embarrassing. I was taken to his house where a hot bath had been ready for the last two hours. Then a huge dish of chicken pilau was placed before me and I was almost commanded to eat it all. I knew I would have to put up a good show, for Byanna is rather sensitive and would be greatly offended if I did not do justice to the meal.

When this feast was over, I was taken to the garage at the rear of the house. There stood Byanna's Land Rover, laden to the brim with all manner of unnecessary things intended for my comfort. There was a spring-cot and mattress, camp chairs, camp tables, a canvas camp tub, a camp basin and stand, a small refrigerator and a fan, both worked by kerosene oil, and heaven knew what else. As for foodstuffs! There were gunny bags in large numbers crammed with stores; enough, I should think, for a whole month. Four Primus stoves, one of them with a double-range cooker, had been provided; and pots, pans and storage drums for water were tied on at inconceivable points and at incredible angles. Where he and I were going to sit seemed an insoluble problem.

Byanna asked me if I would like to sleep the night in his house and start next morning, to which I said I was as fresh as a daisy after that hot bath and marvellous chicken pilau. Could we start right away? Wonderfully obliging, he consented at once, and an hour later the Land Rover, looking more like one of those covered wagons from the prairies of America, took the road northwards that led to Srisailam.

We left the main road a little beyond Doranala village and negotiated the rough track of eighteen miles that eventually brought us directly through the jungle to the village of Peddacheruvu, passing another hamlet named Tummalabayalu on the way, the scene of an encounter with a man-eater in my young and inexperienced days. There I tumbled out of the Land Rover and sat on someone's doorstep, while Byanna rattled away in the Telugu dialect to the throng of villagers that gathered around us.

It transpired he was trying to find a suitable room for us to occupy. This did not take long, for the headmaster of the local school who had joined the crowd to learn the purpose of our visit, at once volunteered to let us live in the main hall of his little school.

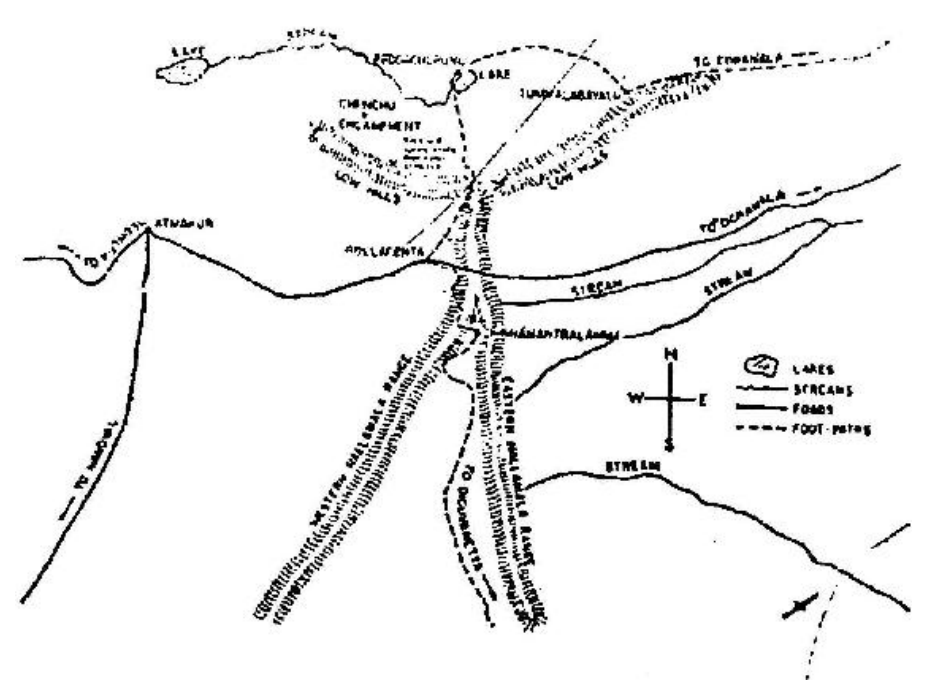
We drove the Land Rover there and unloaded. By the time we had taken everything out of the vehicle we had crammed that room to capacity, though more than half the objects were quite unnecessary.

Water was fetched for us in pots by several willing villagers. We

were conducted to the bathroom, in a separate building, where we bathed; and we were shown the lavatory, in yet another building. It was a long time before we could sit down to our first meal of curry and rice that Byanna had brought from his home at Markapur.

Dusk had fallen by now, but people from the village still kept coming and going, to stare at us and ask innumerable questions which Byanna answered in Telugu at great length. Finally I took matters into my own hands. Selecting three or four of the villagers who seemed to know something about the man-eater, and carrying my rifle, I asked them to follow me outside.

It was moonlight. The main street of the village led directly to the track that skirted the lake on its way to the Doranala-Atmakur road. Half a furlong away the lake began, and I could see the water glinting in the moonlight.



I walked along the street with my companions, who very soon told me that it would be dangerous for us to leave the precincts of the village because of the man-eater. I said I wanted to talk to them where we could have peace and quiet, which was impossible in that infernal schoolroom, and I reassured them about the tiger. Finally we reached the edge of the lake and sat down by the water. It was delightfully cool there and the moonlight was so bright that we could see right across the wide expanse of the lake to the jungle on the other side.

I noticed that my companions kept glancing nervously around, but

as we were in the open with no cover for the tiger, there really was no justification for their fear. Little by little I learned of the tiger's doings, as I have already set them out, and my companions ended their narrative with a fervent plea that I should shoot the beast at all costs.

I think Byanna must have wondered at my sudden departure, for he came looking for me with about twenty people and joined us just at the water's edge. We discussed plans as to what to do on the morrow.

And that was when a tiger started to roar. From directly opposite us, on the other side of the lake, where we could see the dark edge of the jungle coming down to the water, he roared at regular intervals. To me that sound was pleasing, exciting, tempting and challenging. I had been told enough to know I would be able to recognize the man-eater at once by his limp, if I could only see him. I had talked enough and eaten enough; and those roars were very, very inviting. And the moonlight was so wonderfully bright.

On an impulse I jumped to my feet and told my companions I was going after the tiger. They were aghast. But before they could remonstrate, I set off almost at a trot along the track that I knew skirted the lake closely for nearly half its circumference till it reached the other side, before breaking away into the jungle. I judged the tiger was roaring at least a mile away, maybe further, and I wanted to reach him before he stopped. Obviously he was coming down to the lake for a drink.

In less than fifteen minutes I was almost there, and the tiger was still calling, although at longer intervals. I knew that very soon he would stop. He was so close now that the earth seemed to tremble with each roar as I left the track I had been following to cut through the jungle towards the sound. That was when my difficulties began.

I knew very well that if I attempted to walk through the undergrowth the tiger would hear me. He would either go away then or, if he was the man-eater, he might creep forward to ambush me by a flank or rear attack. My hope lay in finding a footpath if possible, and in following it in silence so as to try to see him first—an almost impossible thing to do.

Luckily I discovered that footpath. Rather it was a game-trail that went down to the water and not a footpath; but it offered salvation, for it was leading more or less in the general direction from which the tiger's roars were still coming, although at longer and longer intervals.

I started to follow the *path*, glancing down frequently to make sure I did not stumble or tread upon something that would betray my presence. I judged the tiger was well within 200 yards when he ceased to roar. I stopped advancing as soon as I realized this, for it would be impossible for me to locate him. Whereas he would assuredly hear my footsteps in spite of all my precautions in the complete silence that

now enveloped us both. I thought quickly and had an idea. An acacia tree grew to the right of the game trail. Its trunk was hardly thick enough to hide my body when I sheltered behind it, but provided I remained absolutely motionless there was a hope that the tiger would not detect—at least, not too soon.

Quickly I stepped behind the acacia, drew in my breath, and imitated the roar of a tiger with all the force of my lungs. Twice I did this, in rapid succession. Then I remained silent to await events. And happen they did, in real earnest. The tiger in front of me, apparently amazed and greatly annoyed at the impudence of the intruder who dared to come so close to him and roar twice, although those roars must have sounded miserably puny and weak, lost his temper. I could hear him coming, grunting and snarling as he bounded forward. Fortunately, the acacia had been growing at a spot where the pathway followed a straight course for a few yards, rather than at a bend.

Before long, down the pathway came the tiger in short bounds, so intent upon looking for another of his kind that he failed to notice me behind the trunk of that acacia tree. He had passed when I was forced to put him to the test. I coughed almost imperceptibly.

The tiger whisked around in his tracks to face this new sound. He knew it did not come from another tiger but from a man, and his reaction would show whether he was the man-eater or not.

I did not move a fraction of an inch as the beast stared at the acacia. Having no sense of smell, he could not locate me exactly, although he must have seen some part of me and knew that something was sheltering behind that tree. He hesitated, and then stepped three or four paces to his left from where he would be able to get a better view of me.

Recognition came to both of us at once. He found out what I was and where I was standing, while I found out that he was not the man-eater. For there was not the faintest trace of a limp in his walk. We stared at each other.

The next three or four seconds would decide our fate. I certainly had no wish to shoot a harmless tiger provided he left me alone. But would he? I had excited and irritated him by roaring, and had made matters worse by coughing. An angry tiger cannot often control itself.

The tiger sank to his haunches and I knew the charge was coming. I aimed and was about to press the trigger when one of those unaccountable events, that often make a tiger's behaviour unpredictable, occurred. He turned and bounded into the bushes!

Allowing time for him to get away and for my nerves to calm down. I retraced my steps along the game-trail to the roadway and back to the village where I told Byanna and the others, who admitted they had never expected to see me again, what had happened.

To say I was disappointed would be putting matters lightly, but I was glad I had not made things worse by shooting the wrong tiger.

During the next three days we bought four baits and tied them out at the most likely spots where *nullahs* and pathways crossed each other, and within a mile or so of the big lake, and above each bait we constructed an almost perfect *machan*.

That was how I came to meet an individual who, as events were to prove shortly, was as brave a man as any I have met. He was a Chenchu—the name by which the aboriginal jungle men of these areas are known—and he carried a bow and a quiver of arrows like most Chenchus do. These, and a filthy rag as a loin-cloth, were apparently his sole pssessions. One more thing he had, and I think it was his greatest asset. Appu—for that was his name—had a most infectious smile, a marvellous sense of humour. He was as happy as the day was long.

Appu offered his services in selecting suitable places in which to tie my baits and in building the *machans*, and I was quick to accept, for his smile won me completely. What wonderful *machans* he built! He concealed them so cleverly that, even when staring at one from the ground and knowing its location, it was difficult for me to realize a *machan* was there. Indeed, little Appu added greatly to my knowledge of the art of *machan*-tying, for with him it was an art indeed!

Nothing happened the first night, nor the second. The buffalo heifer that we had tied a quarter of a mile from the spot where I had met the roaring tiger was killed and half-eaten on the third night, so that on the fourth night I sat over this heifer's remains, awaiting the return of the killer.

Would it be the lame tiger, the man-eater, or would it be the 'roaring tiger'—as I had come to call him—that I had encountered a few days earlier? Unfortunately the ground was so hard that no tracks were visible to answer this question in advance. The tiger returned before darkness had set in, which is something rare for a tiger to do, although sunset is the usual time at which panthers come to their kills. He did not even glance upwards at Appu's perfect *machan* but walked boldly up to the heifer's carcase and gazed down upon it.

There was nothing wrong with his walk. He was not the lame tiger I had been told to look for. He was not the man-eater.

The thought came to me to try a little experiment from that wonderful *machan*. I made the grating call of a panther. The effect on that tiger was astounding; he was galvanized into fury. He whirled around to locate the puny but audacious panther who had dared to challenge his right to his own kill. Where was this intruder?

'Hah-ah! Hah-ah!' I called again. Then stopped.

'Wrauff! Wrauff! Wrauff!' roared the tiger, and charged directly at

the tree in which I was hidden. I had carried the joke too far. The tiger was furious and hellbent upon exterminating what he thought to be his spotted foe, hiding in the tree. Moreover the tree was an easy one to climb and I was only about fifteen feet above the ground.

The tiger disappeared from view as he got below the platform of my *machan*. The tree shook as he sprang into the first fork and I could hear the scraping of his claws upon the bark as he scrambled upwards, growling furiously. It was not a big tree and his efforts, together with his weight, set up a strange trembling that made my whole *machan* vibrate.

Matters had gone far enough. In another moment those enourmous paws would reach up and tear the platform on which I was seated to shreds. I would be thrown off the tree and the tiger would probably jump down upon me before he could realize I was no panther.

'Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!' I screeched in desperation, leaping to my feet as I pointed the rifle downwards, waiting for his head or paw to show over the edge of the platform. The unfortunate tiger really got the shock of his life. He recognized the human voice and must have wondered what sort of panther could be above him, since it had, all of a sudden, turned itself into a man. And courage was not his strong point, as he had shown a few days earlier when he had met me behind the acacia.

The growling stopped and the tree shook furiously as the tiger hurled his bulk to earth. He did not stop for a moment, but bounded into the undergrowth; then I heard the noise of his precipitate departure through the dry bushes.

When I got back to camp I told Byanna and Appu and my other friends of the joke I had at the tiger's expense. They were all amused, but little Appu was tickled to death. He slapped his thighs with the palms of his hands and laughed and laughed and laughed. Almost gasping for breath, he choked over his words: 'But yesterday, the tiger heard a tiger that turned out to be a man. Today it heard a panther that became a man. It must be thinking it's going mad!'

Next day, I replaced the heifer that had been killed, and that very night this new heifer was killed. We had not changed the spot nor the *machan* where I had teased the tiger the day before. We were after the lame tiger, the man-eater, so it was an advantage to use the *machan* from which the other tiger, the stupid 'roaring tiger' as we had named him, had been driven away. By using this *machan* again, we could at least be sure the 'roaring tiger' would not interfere. So it followed that, when the slaying of the new heifer was reported at about 9 a.m. by Appu and the half-dozen men armed with axes and staves, who had gone to inspect the various baits, my spirits rose in anticipation. At last I was to come to grips with the man-eater himself, for surely here

he was at last!

Filled with this hope, I climbed into the *machan* early that afternoon and had not been there long when a mongoose appeared. He must have been extremely hungry, for he nibbled at the dead heifer and then started bolting mouthfuls of flesh until he was bloated and could hardly walk, before he toddled away.

As if they had been awaiting his departure, a bevy of what are known in this part of India as 'gerjers'—a species of small quail—appeared in the clearing within a short time. They did not touch the putrefying flesh but started. pecking at the myriads of tiny beetles and other insects attracted by the stench from the carcase that was increasing with the heat of the day. Bluebottle flies settled in hordes upon the exposed flesh. There they would lay eggs that in a short while would hatch into myriads of white grubs. These would eat up the flesh and would, in turn be eaten by birds and insects that would come to prey upon them. In less than twenty-four hours that carcase would be reduced to mere bones by the action of maggots alone, apart from the scavengers of the sky, the vultures, that were already gathering for the final feast, and the scavengers of the night—hyaenas and jackals—that would arrive for the scant remains after darkness had fallen.

Then, of course, there was the rightful owner—the lame tiger as I hoped he would be—who should turn up by eight o'clock at the latest.

My reverie was rudely interrupted by the raucous but happy crow of a junglecock nearby: 'Wheew! Kuck-kaya-kaya-kuck'm' he called, and I knew without looking at my watch that it was nearing half-past five. Evening had come and I began to hope that the man-eater would be as obliging as his inoffensive cousin, the roaring tiger, by putting in his appearance before nightfall.

Down by the lake which, incidentally, was behind me, two families of peafowl began to call to each other: 'Mi-aow!' while what is known as the 'Golamothy Bird,' from far away, gave her mating call: 'Gol-a-mothy! Gol-a-mo-thy!' Every male within earshot, hearing that irresistible, enticing cry, would fly to her and before sunset she would have a number of suitors from whom to make her choice.

Twilight soon enveloped the jungle, that period of uncertainty between daylight and dark, when the eyesight is most easily deceived and innocent shrubs and bushes assume the menacing appearance of crouching, watching beasts.

Phutt! Phutt! Phutt! A number of birds flapped heavily in headlong flight from a tree somewhere behind me. They gave voice to a shrieking alarm 'Kee-ya! Kee-ya! Kee-ya!'

Something had aroused a flock of crimson-headed parrots from their roosting place and they fled to seek another. Now why did the

parrots do that? Maybe they saw a wild cat on the prowl. Or could it be the tiger?

Time slipped by.

'Keech! Keech! Keech! Keech!' A number of miniature bats of the insect-eating variety swooped and dived at their invisible prey, taking them on the wing and screeching in sheer joy in such high notes, I am told, that it is beyond the human ear to register them. And I am right glad of that as the screeching, creaking noises they were making at the moment that I could hear were loud enough.

A nightjar fluttered overhead and settled somewhere behind me. He started the chorus of calls that would soon be repeated by a number of his fellows: 'Chuck chuck Chuck Chuck Chuckooooo; Chuck Chuck …'

Then he stopped abruptly and took flight. I could see him sailing over the treetop to my right. And a second later I heard a deep sigh beneath my *machan*, followed by complete silence. Although I could not see him, I knew the tiger had arrived.

He was standing directly below me, and I sensed that he was inspecting the kill and his surroundings with the utmost care to make quite certain no hidden danger threatened. Would he look up and discover the *machan*? A nerve-straining period of inactivity followed. Then I heard a continuous small sound which I shall not try to describe, although I could easily identify it. The tiger was answering the calls of nature.

I was elated. This was a good sign indeed. It showed he was not at all frightened or suspicious.

The next instant the tiger walked boldly into view from under my tree. In spite of the fact that it had become very dark I could make out those cautious but purposeful strides that took him to the kill. There was not the vestige of a limp in his walk. He was certainly not a lame animal and therefore not the man-eater.

I voiced my disgust beneath my breath. The tiger stopped as if he had heard me. Then he continued till he reached the dead heifer, where he halted to look down upon it.

Without doubt he was my old friend, the roaring tiger. For a moment I was tempted to shoot him, for this animal was becoming a nuisance. He had taken two of my baits and probably would take a lot more. And baits cost money.

Then I stopped to think. Could he be the man-eater, after all? What evidence did I really have that the man-eater was lame, beyond hearsay? Perhaps the story was all wrong. Maybe this was the man-eater, standing there, just waiting to be shot.

But I recalled his behaviour on the two occasions when he had seen me and found I was a man. That was not the conduct of a man-

eater: he had acted more like a scared rabbit. Nevertheless, there was no getting away from it. This animal was becoming a nuisance. So I raised my rifle, aimed quickly at the ground under his belly and fired.

The bullet struck the earth between his legs and in spite of the near darkness I could see the puff of dust it raised as it buried itself in the ground. As for the tiger, he arched his back like a frightened cat, then became elongated as he stretched himself for a mighty spring that took him clean out of sight.

I came down from the *machan* in disgust, shouldered my rifle, and using a pocket torch to light the way in case I trod on a snake, made my way back to the village.

The next day I bought yet another heifer and tied it out at the same spot. Surely the roaring tiger would not take it this time? And I made up my mind that, if he did, I would shoot him without compunction.

This time he did not kill. Oh, he came there all right. The whole village and I heard him. He roared from about ten till near midnight. He had seen the heifer and was very hungry. But, mindful of a tiger that had turned into a man, followed by a panther-man or shall we say a 'leopard-man', and then of some strange thing that made an awful bang and hit the ground between his feet with tremendous force, he could not summon enough courage to kill the tempting bait. He roared his frustration and displeasure instead.

Next morning no kills were reported. But little Appu had some news to give. He had found the trail of the lame tiger near one of the further baits. It had passed within a few yards of the heifer, even halting to look at it. Yet it had not killed the buffalo. Appu said he felt that the man-eater was averse to buffalo meat and would therefore not take any of our baits, however long we might try. He suggested I exchange the buffaloes for bulls and try again.

He said he had another plan in mind. I inquired what it was. Appu grinned hugely as he suggested that he and I might go looking for the man-eater every night until we found him.

A good idea, I replied. As good a notion as looking for a needle in a haystack.

It took a little time for Appu to understand me. With haystacks he was familiar. But not with needles. After all, why should he want one? He wore no clothes! I suggested a pin, instead of a needle. That did not register, either. What had Appu to do with pin? Then I had a brainwave. I picked up a dried twig and twisted off the largest thorn growing on it. I went through the motion of hiding the thorn in a haystack and asked Appu how long he might take to find it. He shrugged.

I said that this was like looking for the lame tiger in an area of

jungle that extended for miles and miles. Appu's face brightened as he caught my meaning at last. He laughed and he laughed and he laughed.

All this talk had made breakfast late, but we set out as soon as I had finished. Appu led me in a southwesterly direction from the lake, over the brow of a low hill and into a valley on the other side. A dry streambed wound along this valley and one of my baits had been tied at a spot where a fire-line crossed this stream.

The path we had just followed from the lake also crossed the stream at its intersection with the fire-break and led onwards to a Chenchu settlement about three or four miles away. Chenchus do not live in villages. One stumbles upon a tiny circular hut of sticks and grass, scarcely noticeable in the surrounding jungle. A whole family of ten persons may live in one such hut. There may possibly be another hut nearby, or you may have to cover many miles before reaching the next.

We had deliberately selected the junction-point as the best spot for tying the bait, for a tiger coming upstream or downstream, or from either side of the fireline or footpath—that is, from any one of six directions—would see it immediately. And now, clearly in the dust of the footpath and coming from the opposite sides, were the footprints of a tiger.

I studied them closely. There were the pug-marks of three feet, instead of the four distinct impressions a tiger makes when he is ambling along, or the two marks he leaves when he is stalking by placing each hind foot upon the place vacated by the corresponding forefoot as it is moved forward to avoid treading upon a dried leaf or a twig. There was no doubt about it: this animal was using only three of his feet, and there was something wrong with the fourth. Hence he was unable to leave the quadruple trail normally made by a roaming tiger.

At last I was looking at the man-eater's pug-marks. The uneven distance between them indicated that he was limping badly, almost hopping along, while an occasional drag-mark in the dust showed where he had tried to put his weight on that right foreleg but could not do so. It was clear that the injury was severe and that the wound had not yet healed. I came to the conclusion that it could not be a very old one.

By tracking backwards for about 200 yards we reached the place where the tiger had come out of the jungle intending to cross or follow the footpath. Here he had spotted our bait and had deliberately walked up to it. We could see where he had halted to inspect the heifer from a distance of ten feet and then continued on his way.

This conduct puzzled me. Judging from the severe handicap from

which the beast was suffering, he must be very hungry indeed, if not in a state of starvation most of the time. In that emaciated condition, why had he refused a meal that was his only for the taking? One could only conclude that he was not so very hungry after all, for hunger is an urge that neither a starving human nor a starving tiger can resist.

We followed the tiger's trail after leaving our heifer. He had continued along the pathway for only another five or six yards and had then broken into the jungle where he had turned back to recross the streambed and enter the forest on the other side. Here we lost the trail among the dry leaves and hard ground. It appeared as if the tiger had decided to resume his walk to wherever he had been going before he had spotted our buffalo and moved closer to examine it.

Appu and I decided we would ramble in his wake, or rather in the general direction he had been going, for as I have just said, the dry ground afforded no further trail. In a little while we came upon a game-*path*. The ground was still too hard for us to see any pug-marks, but we could make out the abrasions and scrapes left upon the baked earth by the pointed hooves of sambar and spotted deer, while a little further on a bear had recently been engaged upon heaving over boulders that bordered the *path* in his search for grubs and roots.

Appu suggested that, after all, the lame tiger might have been making for this game-trail and had probably followed it, although we could see no traces, and I agreed with him. The track seemed to be much used by wild animals, for not long afterwards we found the marks of a sounder of wild pig, coming from the opposite direction. Of the tiger there was still no trace.

But a little further on we found we were right. A *nullah* cut across the *path* almost at right angles. The trail we were following led sharpy down an incline into this *nullah* and up the other side, and clearly imprinted upon the loose earth of this *nullah* were the tracks of the lame tiger, leading away from us. They had been made the previous night and we had been correct in thinking that the game-trail we were following was the tiger's route. We were interested and decided to find out where the tiger had wanted to go.

We had covered more than a mile along that game-trail when we reached the crest of a small hill and looked down the other side. Below us, leading across a small clearing, we could see a distinct pathway and knew that it was the rough road that led to the Chenchu settlement I have told you about. The game-trail we were following had been but a short cut that had led across the hill instead of going around it, and the lame tiger had been moving towards the settlement.

We continued, and within the next half-mile we discovered that our game-trail led across the Chenchu roadway. Here the tiger had left the game-trail and had walked along the roadway, for his tracks lay

clearly in the dust before us. We followed him for nearly another mile, when we heard voices approaching from the opposite direction. Around a bend appeared some ten Chenchus, walking rapidly and talking loudly among themselves. All carried bows and arrows and half of them were armed with crude spears and axes in addition.

They caught sight of us and came forward, talking excitedly, but before they could reach us we had overheard and knew the reason for their agitation. The man-eater had carried off a Chenchu from the hamlet the previous evening.

When they reached us they told us the story. They had all known of the presence of the man-eater for some time and went about, when they had to, in groups armed as they were now. But Kalla, one of the their number, had always been a hunter and held all tigers, including man-eaters, in contempt. He had proclaimed that he was afraid of no tiger, while on the other hand every tiger walked in fear of him. Kalla had taken his axe and his bow and arrows and his long spear that morning and gone out hunting. He had returned for a late lunch and had informed his wife that he had failed to kill anything, but consoled her with the news that he had discovered a beehive in a hole in a tree almost within a stone's throw of the village.

Kalla had left his bow and arrows and spear behind as unnecessary impediments and had taken his axe, a box of matches and some straw with which to hack out the hive and smoke the bees away, and also an empty tin in which to collect the honey. In a short while, some of the Chenchus heard the sound of his axe and had wondered how they had been so foolish as not to detect the presence of the hive before Kalla had done.

At that moment they were startled by a scream: Tiger! Tiger!' Kalla had shrieked, and 'Help! Help! Help!' Then there was silence.

Kalla had not been popular and nobody, including his own wife, was in too great a hurry to rush to his rescue. They waited to see when he would return, but Kalla did not show up. In due course the menfolk gathered together, armed themselves as best they could, and went to the hollow tree where Kalla had found the beehive. The tree and the bees were there, and the axe, but no trace of Kalla. Instead they found fresh gum oozing from the deep abrasions that had been made in the trunk of the tree as the tiger had stood on his hind-paw and grabbed at Kalla with the only forepaw he could use—his left. Necessarily, the operation had been a clumsy one, as the handicapped tiger must have had to support his weight against the tree trunk while reaching for his quarry with one foreleg. This had given Kalla time to scream for help. Had the tiger not been maimed, the Chenchu would not have heard or seen his attacker, while had the tree been a few feet higher, Kalla would have been beyond the reach of the man-eater,

which could not have followed him.

The man-eater had dragged Kalla through the bushes into the jungle, where they came across blood and the remnants of his *loincloth*. They had followed for a short distance after that and then stopped, for nobody seemed to have liked Kalla very much. They knew he was dead. What was the use of following? Then they remembered that somebody had told them a couple of *dorais* had come to the village of Peddacheruvu to shoot this man-eater, and they had decided to go there to tell them. But it was too late and darkness had already set in.

So next morning some of the Chenchus had leisurely finished breakfast before setting out to bring Byanna and me the news. That explained how Appu and I came to meet them on the way. My guide and I now knew where the lame tiger had been heading when he had observed our buffalo, and we also knew why he had not killed and eaten the heifer.

Evidently he had made a good meal of the Chenchu the previous night and had then wandered away for water. As likely as not he had visited the lake for a drink. There he had remembered his human kill and had decided to return and finish off what was left. He had been on the way back when he saw our bait but was not hungry enough to kill and eat it, and as likely as not he preferred the taste of the Chenchu's flesh to tough buffalo meat, even though by now there could be little of the Chenchu left.

We told our part in these happenings to the Chenchus, who now became enthusiastic and offered to help in trying to trace where the tiger had gone. We knew that if we succeeded we would find Kalla's remains. But to them this appeared of little importance. Primarily, they wanted me to shoot the tiger, for as long as he remained their lives were in danger. With the eleven Chenchus to follow the trail, we went in the wake of the lame tiger for another few yards before we found he had again turned into the jungle. This time his passage could not escape those eleven pairs of searching eyes and in due course we came to a small, dry *nullah*, up which our quarry had turned. We could see his footmarks, while one of the Chenchus whispered that their settlement was hardly a quarter of a mile away. Within a short time we got the smell of the cadaver, and a little later we heard the hum of a thousand bluebottle flies. At last we had come to what remained of the unfortunate Kalla, the man who had been a little too cocksure. He had met the fate of many a hunter before him, and the fate that is in store for many more the world over. The fate that comes to those who are overconfident and careless.

There was very little left of the Chenchu. His head had been spared. Also his hands and feet, the usual portions of the human

anatomy left by a man-eater. Even his shin-bones had been chewed and splintered, and some of his ribs, while sections of his spinal column lay about with hardly any flesh on them.

The man-eater must have been very hungry. Indeed, he must have been almost starving to have made such a meal. Again I wondered why he had spared my buffalo bait, which would have provided him with a far bigger repast.

A short distance away one of the Chenchus discovered a thigh bone. Of the other there was no trace. A hyaena or jackal had probably carried it way.

We discussed the situation in whispers. My companions were divided in their opinions. About half said that I should sit up for the tiger that night in a *machan* they offered to construct, while the other half were convinced it was a waste of time, as the man-eater would never return. There was nothing left for him to eat. Yes indeed: a hyaena would come, certainly jackals. A tiger? Never. Tigers were not carrion-eaters!

Then I remembered that the lame tiger appeared to be a very hungry animal, and I had no doubt of the course I should follow. I would sit over the remains of Kalla that night, come what may. There was a chance, albeit a slim one, that the tiger would return. I told my companions this and even the doubtful ones now saw my point. With enthusiasm, one and all set to work, and under the direction of that expert on *machans*, Appu, once again a wonderful structure took shape before my eyes.

Appu had selected a bushy tree that grew some thirty-five yards away, and from the *machan* the Chenchus built on it, rather higher than usual, being some twenty feet off the ground in order to gain an uninterrupted view of the remains, I would await the doubtful return of the man-eater. We brought the solitary thigh-bone to where the other bones lay, so as to keep them as closely as possible together and offer a more tempting sight that might at least bring the man-eater forward to sniff at them.

Leaving Appu to the task with the other Chenchus, I hurried back to Peddacheruvu for something to eat and also for my night equipment. Byanna was excited when he heard the news and wished me luck.

It was past four o'clock when I returned to find Appu and two others perched on the *machan*. They had covered the few remains with leafy branches to conceal them from the keen sight of vultures, and these branches they removed when they left for the Chenchu settlement, where Appu had elected to spend the night with the others.

With the departure of my henchman, I began to think about the

lame tiger. I wondered if he had really been maimed in a fight with another tiger as reported, or by a gunshot wound fired by some poacher, as frequently is the case. Undoubtedly the animal was very severely handicapped, so much so, in fact, that he must have lacked the confidence to tackle the heifer I had tied out for him. I concluded that this was the real reason why he had left it alone. This tiger would indeed prove to be in a very emaciated condition, necessarily dependent on the few small animals and other creatures that he could stalk and tackle upon his three sound legs till such time as some lucky chance presented itself and he found and killed some unfortunate human being.

With this thought came fresh hope. A tiger as hungry as this would surely be tempted to return to the scraps that were left, even after the full meal he had made the night before.

The evening drew to its close in comparative silence. There were few birds and small animals, such as monkeys, in this part of the jungle, or they were strangely quiet for some unaccountable reason. This was unfortunate, for not only are the sounds of the forest for me endless source of delight, but it is upon the cries of alarm made by these smaller creatures, as well as the members of the deer family, that I largely rely to tell me of a tiger's movements. Once or twice, in the distance, a partridge called, but of jungle fowl and peafowl there was no evidence. I wondered about this till the answer came suddenly. The Chenchu settlement! Those little marksmen, with their bows and arrows, had wiped out all the edible birds within a considerable radius.

Darkness began to fall and the birds of the night, being less edible in Chenchu opinion than their unfortunate cousins of the day, and certainly far more difficult to hunt, began their calls. I welcomed the sounds that broke the monotonous silence of the evening I had just passed. A night-heron wailed in despair from the bed of some dry stream, and his cry was answered by a companion further down the valley. Far away, a pair of jackals raised their haunting call.

A squat kind of wood-cricket inhabits the forests of Andhra Pradesh in large numbers, which I have never come across nor heard in the jungles of Madras and Mysore. This little insect chirrups loudly, and when hundreds of them chirrup together the noise is loud enough to drown all other sounds. At times these vibrations synchronize and the resultant throb has the intensity of a tractor working nearby.

I had been listening to this noise that had started soon after sunset. It appeared to be growing steadily in volume and intensity as more and more of the insects joined in the chorus. Nothing else could I hear. Suddenly there was a sharp diminution of the sound. The crickets in the distance appeared to have stopped chirruping, and in a

matter of seconds those nearer to me, becoming aware of the silence of their distant companions, stopped chirruping too. It was as if the tractor had come to a sudden halt.

The ensuing hush was relieving to the nerves in one sense but in another way it was strangely foreboding and terrifying. Just what had made the crickets stop their chorus?

The night-herons were still wailing to each other in the distance when I first heard the cause: the call of the man-eater! He roared in the valley. Once, twice and again.

Now I knew why the crickets had ceased their chorus so abruptly. They had heard the first roars of the tiger that had been inaudible to me because of the din they were making. Only after they had stopped was I able to hear him. But what had the man-eater got to do with crickets? Why should they fear him? I fell to wondering at the answer to this question. It intrigued me so much that I decided to put it to a friend of mine in Madras, who is a naturalist. The answer, as I found out later, is a simple one, and I shall tell you about it before I end this story.

The tiger was still roaring. He roared and roared as he came closer and closer. Obviously he intended returning to the remains of Kalla, the Chenchu, but why was he roaring in this fashion? It was as strange as it was unusual. When a tiger returns to his kill he does so in absolute silence, using the utmost caution to conceal his every movement with each step he takes. He certainly does not advertise his presence by roaring.

I was intrigued and awaited the answer in what he would do in the next thirty minutes.

He came as close as about fifty yards from my *machan*, but there he stayed put, hidden in the undergrowth, while he continued to roar. Never for a moment did he come out or show himself, although after some time he started to move around my *machan* and Kalla's remains in a wide circle, while his roaring grew louder and more fierce.

It did not take long to realize that the man-eater knew all about my presence in the tree overlooking his kill. But how could he have found out? He certainly could not have discovered my *machan*, for he had started roaring a long while back and quite a considerable distance away. Thus it was clear that he had known about me and the *machan* from the very start, and that he was trying to frighten me away.

There was only one way in which he could have found out. The man-eater had been lying in concealment all the time and had watched us build the *machan*. He knew some hated human enemy was awaiting his return, and that a return spelt great danger to him. Like all man-eaters, this tiger had an inherent fear of the human race, but

in this instance the urge to eat again, in spite of his last big feed, was making him bold enough to think he could drive his foe away by roaring loudly and often. He had evidently followed Appu and the other Chenchus as far as their encampment and had now come back in the hope of being able to gnaw a few bones.

The man-eater continued to roar as he circled again and again, and I waited in patience to see what he would do. There could be only one answer to this intriguing situation within the next half-hour or so. Either the man-eater must become impatient and take a chance, or I would become impatient and go down in search of him. The third alternative was that the tiger would go away and I would lose him. At all costs, I must not allow that to happen.

Time passed. Half an hour. Then another ten minutes. But the man-eater did not show himself. Instead of continuing to move around in a wide circle as he had been doing, the tiger was now evidently lying on the ground, or perhaps sitting on his haunches, in a thicket that I could just make out as a big, black void in the darkness that was softened by the stars that shone brilliantly from a clear sky. And from this thicket he was roaring and roaring with unabated vigour and fury to drive away the person or persons he well knew were hidden in the tree where he had noticed such activity in the afternoon.

When there is something to be done, I am not a very patient person, and the urge to act was growing stronger with each moment. So at last I started to descend the tree as silently as possible. As stealthily as I moved, I knew the man-eater would hear me. If only he would give me time to reach the foot of the tree and walk the few steps to where Kalla's bones lay! Danger lay in the risk that he might attack while I was halfway down. Then I would be helpless, as I would not be able to use my rifle. I could feel the sweat of fear pour down my face and my hands were slippery with it. But I controlled my feet to move as silently and surely as possible. To fall now and hurt myself would mean lying on the ground entirely at the man-eater's mercy.

I was about halfway down when the roaring ceased. He had heard me and guessed that his quarry was on the move. Would he come closer to investigate? Naturally, he would. He might even then be only a few feet away.

The thought made me shaky and I quickened my descent, almost slipping once or twice. I had to feel for each foothold, although the stars gave enough light to make the ground visible. A great feeling of relief and thankfulness surged through me as my foot touched the earth at last. Quickly I brought my loaded rifle, which I had to sling over my right shoulder while making the descent, to the ready, while I stood with my back to the tree to meet the charge I expected at any moment.

The quietness was intense. Not a leaf stirred. The crickets were silent. The man-eater must be creeping towards me now. Surely he would make some sound, the faintest of rustles that would tell me where he was and give me a chance. But he made no sound. There was no rustle. Only an unearthly stillness.

Then it happened! The strain on the tiger had been as great as it had been on me, and he could contain himself no longer. With a shattering roar, he charged.

But he came from quite a different direction from what I had expected. He launched his attack from behind and not from the bush in which he had been hiding.

I heard the roar and whirled around. The tree-trunk was in my way and I could not see him coming, although I had switched on the torch. The stream of light was thrown back into my eyes by the trunk before me and a dark void lay beyond.

The tiger could not now check himself despite the bright light that faced him. A mass of snarling fury, he was suddenly before me, appearing out of the darkness from behind the tree-trunk and to my left. I leaped to the right, desperately keeping the tree between us, and fired hastily from the shelter of the trunk at the massive head, not more than two yards away.

The tiger tried to turn while continuing his blind rush forward and had reached the tree before my scattered wits responded to the urge to work the underlever of the .405. The spent cartridge case flew out of the breach and I had time for a hasty second shot at the confused, blurred hindquarters of the tiger.

He disappeared, and silence fell once more. I listened intently for the sounds I hoped to hear: the gurgling death-rattle of a dying animal, or the deep, sad moaning of a badly-wounded beast. At least the angry roar of an infuriated creature that has been hit in some place. I listened for the crackling, crashing noise made by a wounded animal in headlong flight, heedless of where it is going so long as it succeeds in getting away.

But none of these sounds was to be heard: absolutely nothing at all. I waited perhaps for ten minutes—or fifteen—with the beam of my torch still on the spot where the tiger disappeared from view.

Still the silence continued. No distant alarm-cries from sambar or spotted deer marked the movements of the man-eater. Could my first shot have been fatal? Perhaps the tiger had dropped dead a few yards away.

Then at last I heard a sound. It was the chirruping of a cricket. Others joined in, singly and in twos and threes, till once more the jungle was filled with that vibrating, rasping, uneven sound. It was as if the hidden tractor had been put to work once again.

Of one thing I could then be certain: the man-eater was no longer in the vicinity.

Relieved of the tension, I lowered the beam of the torch on my rifle to examine the ground at the spot where the tiger was when I fired at his head. Then I moved slowly forward, looking closely at the earth in the direction he went. I passed Kalla's bones and reached the place where he disappeared. But nothing was to be seen.

I moved forward till I reached the thick undergrowth and the ground was hidden from view. I examined the leaves, the twigs and the blades of high grass as I moved on in the direction taken by the fleeing man-eater. But there was not a drop of blood to be seen, nor any sign of disturbed, bitten or clawed undergrowth, no evidence of any wounded creature having passed that way.

Then I remembered the deep silence that followed my two shots and was convinced at last of the shocking fact that I had missed, not once, but twice, and the first at point-blank range.

Not knowing the way to the Chenchu settlement in the darkness, I climbed back into the *machan* and spent the rest of the night in bitter self-recrimination. The man-eater would now become more cunning than ever and would never return to a kill again. As a result he would be hungry more often, and this would lead to him killing more frequently. The Chenchus, and other unfortunate people who lived in that area, would have to pay the penalty. The man-eater would now exact an indirect payment for my poor shooting.

It was 4 a.m. before I fell asleep, to be awakened shortly after dawn by Appu and nearly a dozen Chenchus who had accompanied him to ascertain the result of the shots they must have heard the previous night. Shamefacedly, I related what had happened. Appu said nothing. He merely looked at me with one raised eyebrow. There was a wealth of disdain in that look, and he knew I knew it.

There was nothing to do but ask our Chenchu friends to report at once if they heard or saw anything, more of the man-eater, and then Appu and I took the weary trail back to Peddacheruvu. Neither of us spoke the whole way. We both felt that, under the circumstances, the less said the better.

Byanna tried to cheer me up when he heard the story by giving a short discourse on the law of averages. In effect he said I had to miss some time if I did not want to miss every time. I was not impressed and went to sleep.

Nothing happened during the next two days and Byanna said that we would have to return to Markapur very shortly for fresh supplies, for, incredible as it might seem, that great stock of foodstuffs we had brought with us was running low. Personally, I think he had given up hope and had come to feel that the man-eater was too cunning for us.

Here was where little Appu showed his mettle. He told Byanna to go to town for the fresh supplies while he and I would scour the jungle from dawn to dusk in an attempt to meet the tiger. My friend agreed, but added that he thought we were wasting our time.

Byanna left for Markapur at six next morning, while Appu and I set off at the same hour to try to meet the lame tiger. This time the Chenchu brought not only his axe but his dog, a lanky, cadaverous cur, whose ears had been cut off as a puppy to avoid attracting the hordes of 'horse-flies,' as they are called in India, that pester horses and dogs in later life by collecting on their ears. I do not know the real name of these pests, but I am told that they belong to the same family as the African tsetse fly. Their bite, unlike that of their African cousins, is quite harmless, although very sharp and painful.

This apparition of a dog, which Appu addressed as 'Adiappa,' looked as if he had not eaten for at least six months. Now Adiappa is a man's name in the Telugu dialect and definitely not that of a dog. I asked Appu the reason and he replied that Adiappa was his neighbour's name, a person whom Appu disliked intensely. He had, therefore, named the cur after him to insult the neighbour. In this strategy, however, Appu had come off second best, as he went on to add with great resentment that the neighbour, who washed clothes for a living, had retaliated by giving the name Appu to one of his donkeys, which he used for carrying the bundles of dirty linen to the tank for washing.

So Appu and I, with the cur Adiappa dodging between our legs, circled the lake once again, this time along the eastern shore and not by the western approach where the track from Peddacheruvu made its way to the Atmakur- Doranala road. The scrub was thinner at this end of the lake, and as a consequence feathered game like peafowl and partridge were quite plentiful. We also put up a small herd of blackbuck, an animal normally not found in the vicinity of big jungles and usually confined to wastelands bordering the cultivated areas. One old stag, with a jet-black coat and white underbelly and an enormous pair of corkscrew horns, regarded us with studied indifference till Adiappa took it into his head to give chase with a series of hungry yelps. The stag and his harem disappeared and the cur came back to regard us with mournful, accusing eyes. Very plainly he was upbraiding us in his doggie mind for having missed the chance of giving him something to eat.

The blackbuck, which is the most beautiful of the few species of the antelope family in India, was also at one time the most plentiful and roamed the wastelands all over the peninsula in thousands. Since those days they have been relentlessly pursued with bows and arrows, firearms, dogs and all manner of ingenious traps, till today they are

but few and far between, scarcely to be seen in their old haunts and in real danger of extermination. Rules for their protection exist on paper, written in Government offices and printed in notifications and gazettes, but nobody pays heed to them, and the eventual disappearance of this beautiful creature from the face of this earth seems a certainty.

To make matters worse, the blackbuck belongs to the order of animals that chew the cud. That is, their food is swallowed after being partly masticated and passes into the stomach where digestion begins. From here it is returned to the mouth again for further mastication before being finally swallowed. During this process the animal is incapable of quick or prolonged movement and tires easily. If chased for a distance, it falls to earth exhausted and helpless. The indigenous hunters and village poachers know this, and they also know exactly how long after grazing the second digestive process begins and for how long it lasts. So when they observe a herd feeding, they watch patiently till the animals squat down to 'chew the cud.' They wait for a few minutes more and then give chase with packs of dogs, guns, bows and arrows and what not. The frightened antelope tries to escape, but the younger members and the females cannot go far. They collapse exhausted and are either torn to bits by the pursuing dogs or killed at close range when the men come up.

To continue with my story! Appu and I had not gone far after seeing the blackbuck when we crossed the tracks of a family of four nilgai or bluebull, as they are better known. As a rule these animals graze alone. This quartet had gone down the previous night to water at lake. These big antelope leave tracks that look very like those of their cousins of the jungles, the giant sambar deer, the difference being that the former are much more pointed and rather more elongated. At this point we halted. For, superimposed over the tracks of the four nilgai were the pug-marks of a big male tiger.

Appu and I studied the ground carefully and started to follow the tiger's trail for a short distance. Soon we confirmed that he was not our quarry; the lame man-eater. This animal had all four of his feet intact and was suffering no handicap whatever. Undoubtedly we were looking at the pug-marks of our old friend, the roaring but very timid tiger that seemed to insist on haunting us as well as the precincts of the lake. He was no good to us anyhow, while the lame man-eater, being also a male, was hardly likely to keep him company.

We went on and on, working southwards, till by midday we judged we were at least ten miles from the lake which, according to my pocket compass, lay directly north of us. We did not want to go too far as the man-eater had hitherto confined his activities to within about this radius. So after a whispered consultation Appu and I changed

direction and set off on a northwesterly course that should, before evening, bring us to a point due west of the lake and within a couple of miles of the little Chenchu settlement where I had met my last adventure.

Here we ran into difficulties. Such game-trails as we did cross ran at right angles to our course, from southwest to northeast, as the animals that had made them through the years had gone towards the lake for water. So we could not avail ourselves of the natural assistance they afforded by following them, but had to follow a direct course towards our destination by struggling through the jungle. This made for very hard going and slow progress. Every few yards we would come up against thorny bushes or clumps of heavy vegetation. These we had to circumvent. Thus the distance we had to cover was more than doubled and took much more time than planned and required frequent reference to my compass.

The sun was scorchingly hot at 3 p.m., and we were both bathed in perspiration when we reached a small hillock. There was an overhanging rock facing us on one side of this hillock, and from the base oozed a tiny trickle of fresh water, only a few drops at a time, which had formed into a puddle no more than a couple of feet in diameter. The supply of water was so small that a stream could not form and the liquid soaked into the ground at about the same rate as it dripped from the rock. As a result the water was fresh and crystal-clear, and to our overheated and tired bodies as welcome as an oasis in the Sahara.

But there was this difference. Clearly imprinted in the moist earth were the tracks of the tiger we were looking for; in fact there were many pug-marks to be seen, for by accident we had discovered his regular drinking-place. Among the tracks was the blurred drag of his limping foot in places where he had rested it on the ground while he drank.

There was no doubt about it. We were looking at the tracks of the lame man-eater at last! Jubilation filled us, both at discovering the tracks and at finding water to drink. I placed the .405 on the ground and lay on my stomach with just one thought for the moment and that was to drink, and drink and drink. I never bothered to see what Appu was doing or even to think about him. I suppose with the usual *sahib's* accustomed attitude of taking things for granted, my subconscious mind, if it thought at all, expected Appu to wait till I had finished.

It was good that Appu actually did so, for my subconscious mind was apparently not up to form that day. For, as I was enjoying the ice-cold water, the man-eater decided to charge.

There came a tremendous roar from the right of us; 'Wrr-off!' And again: 'Wrr-off! Wrr-off!' And then the man-eater was upon us!

Groping for the rifle with my right hand, I crouched on my knees, turning around as best I could to face the rush. A terrifying apparition greeted me. The snarling form of the tiger was racing towards us in lop-sided, bobbing bounds. He was but fifteen feet away! Appu stood his ground, maniacally flourishing his axe in sweeping circles to meet that onslaught. Yelping frenziedly in front of his master, the dog Adiappa, which up to this moment had showed no sign of being any more than a ludicrous, half-starved cur, stood with bared teeth to meet that awful onslaught.

I suppose the tiger, too, thought the sight before him frightening. The people he had so far killed had been taken by surprise. They had screamed but offered no resistance. In this case a man stood before him, whirling something round and round, while a despicable cur, that he would not have condescended to look at, seemed to want to fight. The only craven thing in the scene and up to the tiger's expectations was the second individual who was rolling on the ground, evidently in abject fear and unable to get up.

The tiger halted for a moment, and in that moment the man-eater had made his greatest and last mistake. The man on the ground—myself—had found his rifle at last and did not get up because he was kneeling to take aim. I fired then, and twice again.

An examination of the dead animal confirmed what I had been told. He had been turned into a man-eater by the severe damage to his right leg suffered during a fight with another tiger. At least, in this case, man was not to blame!

To Appu and his dog, Adiappa, I am grateful that I was able to tell Byanna, when he returned from Markapur very late that evening with a fresh stock of foodstuffs, that his labour had been in vain. Had the stocky little Chenchu and his large-hearted dog not stood their ground but run away, the man-eater would never have paused in his rush and I would not have lived to tell the tale.

To conclude, I will explain why the crickets ceased their chirruping when the man-eater started roaring. My naturalist friend at Madras says it is because the tiger's roars made the ground vibrate. Apparently crickets cannot hear, but they have an acute sense to touch. The vibrations had given them cause for fear—perhaps even an earthquake in the offing? The crickets had stopped shouting at least.

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* See *The Black Panther of Sivanipalli*, Chapter 4.

Three

The Queer Side of Things

VISITS TO THE JUNGLE ARE NOT ALWAYS FOR THE PURPOSE OF HUNTING and killing. Far from it. As I grow older, I find that I have no urge to slay, except when occasion calls for it. So for a change I will tell you of a few incidents of another kind that I have experienced in my forest wanderings.

Among the foothills to the north of the Nilgiri range of mountains lies undulating country, covered by heavy forest to the west where the rainfall is plentiful, and slightly lighter jungle to the east where the monsoon, having expended itself against the lofty Nilgiris, is unable to bring so much rain. Centuries ago, all this land was cultivated and densely populated too, and the remains of quite a number of ruined villages, temples, forts and viaducts are to be found in the forest, covered now by the jungle, where evidently civilization thrived in days gone by.

I have in mind the cattle *patty* of Chemanath, where half-a-dozen wattle huts now stand, enclosed within a rough circle of perhaps two acres of land. The circumference of the circle is outlined by a low barrier of cut, piled thorns, three feet high. The surface within is inches deep in cow dung, accumulated over decades by the hundreds of cattle that have sheltered in this 'patty.' In summer time, when there is no grazing in the forest and the cattle are taken away, this cow dung dries as hard as cement. Then the rains come, and the cattle return. The rain, and the urine passed by hundreds of animals

quartered within the thorn enclosure at night, make a quagmire of the accumulated dung. The herdsmen live in the centre of the enclosure, so if you wish to speak to them you must be prepared to wade through the malodorous morass, which may reach to your ankles or higher.

It is not about this *patty* itself that I intend to tell you, but about the ruins of a great temple that stand perhaps half-a-mile away. The roots of massive fig trees grow within the temple walls, but the sanctuary, the holy of holies which only the Brahmin priests were allowed to enter, remains fairly well preserved. A courtyard encloses this sanctuary, and you pass great pillars of hewn rock, leaning at a crazy angle, till you reach a massive wooden door at least six inches thick. It is studded with great brass knobs and has a mighty lever for opening the door from the outside. The huge draw-bar that closes it on the inside is still there. The rusty hinges, made of crude wrought-iron, still exist, and the two doors creak eerily when you open them to pass inside. Of their own weight, perhaps, or maybe due to the angle at which they hang, they come together and once shut you are immured within the sanctuary and can never escape.

The temple itself is built of solid granite, and a few yards in front are the remains of what must, in its day, have been a magnificent stone well. It is lined with granite and is over 150 feet deep by about the same in diameter. Many of the granite blocks have fallen in now and no sign of water is to be seen at the bottom of the well.

Just over a mile from this temple and well, as the crow flies, stand the remains of a stone fort, surrounded by a moat. The forest now covers everything. Nobody goes there and the Irilas of the jungle give the area a wide berth. For they say the spirits of the thousands who perished there in a matter of a few days still haunt the place. No one knows exactly when the catastrophe happened. The story has been handed down from father to son for many generations and has always been the same. It may have occurred two or three hundred years ago or it may have been much earlier.

The Great Fever came at that time, so they say, and it mowed the people down in thousands. The victims never saw the light of a second day. There were no remedies and no doctors. The people just died where they collapsed and there was nobody to bury them. It is said that the stench of death and decay was so great that people at Kalhatti, seven miles away and halfway up the mountains, could smell it. The few that survived fled from the valley of death, not waiting to take their belongings with them, and civilization came to an end. The jungle took over and blotted out human habitation, while its creatures fed on the rotted flesh and the countless bones of the dead for a whole year.

What this great fever could have been nobody knows, but from the

havoc it wrought, its contagious nature and quick end, people say it could only have been that most dreaded of all infectious diseases, the plague, in one of its most virulent forms. Certain it is that human habitation in the area ended completely, and it has never returned.

Into the holy of holies of the temple no outsider was ever allowed in times past, particularly a meat-eater or one of foreign race. The ancient priests, all Brahmins, would attend bare-bodied arid with bare feet. This makes you wonder whether you are right when you stand within the sanctuary with your boots on.

There is a raised earthen platform at one end, and resting upon it are a number of images, carved in stone, of the sacred animal of the Hindus, the bull. There are about five of them if I remember correctly, varying in size. The bull is always depicted in sitting posture. The largest stands a little over a foot high by about two and a half feet long; the smallest about four inches by ten. To one side is an ancient lamp, perhaps six inches high. It is made of brass, completely dulled with age and oxidization, and consists merely of a hollow cavity to hold the oil, and a lip to support the wick that rests in the oil, the whole standing on a pedestal which is a carving of some deity.

And thereby hangs a tale, for some years ago I went to this temple accompanied by some tourists. They were strangers whom I had met casually in the jungle. They had heard of the temple and asked me where it was, and because it was difficult to locate I had brought them there in person. They were four. We stood inside the holy of holies, looking at the stone bulls which, incidentally, are called 'nandies,' when one of the tourists, let us call him Captain Neide, who came from Australia, noticed the brass lamp and took a fancy to it.

'I think I'll keep this as a souvenir,' he remarked, picking it up and thrusting it into his pocket.

'You shouldn't do that.' I remonstrated, and his wife supported me. 'Put it back, John; we don't need it,' was her comment.

'But why not?' argued John. 'I need it.'

The top of the lamp protruded from his pocket as we went away and I could not help thinking to myself that it was a shame that the lamp was leaving its abode after no one knew how many hundreds of years. I returned to my camp, while the party of tourists went up the hill to the town of Ootacamund, seventeen miles away. They had mentioned they were spending four or five day there, before moving on.

Four days later I was walking along the main road when a black and yellow taxi, coming down from Ootacamund, overtook me and then halted. Taxis do not generally come to jungles, so I approached it curiously to see who was inside. To my great surprise I saw Captain Neide at the back, propped up with pillows, covered with a blanket,

and looking very sick. Next to him sat Mrs Neide, pale and anxious.

'Thank heaven we met you, Mr Anderson,' she burst out. 'Something terrible has happened to John.'

Then she went on to explain that the very evening her husband and their friends reached Ootacamund, he developed a high temperature and became extremely ill. A doctor was summoned, who diagnosed sunstroke and treated the patient accordingly.

But during the night Neide's temperature rose to 106 degrees. He became delirious. His distraught wife and her friends called the doctor again. Neide was taken to hospital, where it was thought he was developing blackwater fever, or an extremely bad bout of malaria. Quinine was administered, but there was no improvement. On the third day Neide was desperately ill, and the hospital staff confessed they could not discover the cause. Neide himself provided the solution on the morning of the fourth day. Delirious most of the time, due to his high temperature, there were short periods when he regained his senses, and during one of these he gasped to his wife, 'Margaret! That lamp! I must take it back to the temple. Get a car, a taxi, anything. I must take it back to the temple today, or I shall die tomorrow. I must take it myself.'

Haltingly he explained that he had had a dream in which he had seen the lamp back in its place on the altar of the old temple. His wife told the house doctor, who merely smiled and said briefly, 'Delirium, madam; he imagined it all.'

But Mrs Neide knew this was not so. On the table in their room at the hotel stood that dreadful lamp. It seemed to draw attention to itself and she could not take her eyes from it.

'I think I shall take him and the lamp by taxi, doctor,' she argued. 'I feel something dreadful is going to happen if we don't return it.'

'Mrs Neide, if you move your husband in his present condition, I'll not be responsible for what happens. He is far too ill and I will not give my permission.'

She went back and told Neide what the doctor had said.

'If you don't help me to return the lamp, I shall be dead by tomorrow. I know it, Margaret,' he gasped.

'I'll take it back in the taxi for you John;' she offered.

'No, no,' he was adamant. 'I brought it away and I must return it,' he insisted. And that was how I came to meet them on the road.

Without comment, I got in beside the driver and directed him to the track that led off the main road to the Chemanath *patty*. A little beyond was the temple, but the car could go no further. Captain Neide, who was conscious now, wanted to carry the lamp to the temple, but it was obvious he was quit unfit to walk.

So I said to him, 'John, I think you have done enough to show

you're sorry for taking the lamp away. You've brought it back as far as you possibly can. The temple deity will understand that. Let Mrs Neide and me take it back for you while you rest here.'

He was too exhausted to reply but nodded his consent and, with his wife carrying the lamp and me leading the way, we went back to the temple. The ancient door creaked open and closed of its own volition behind us. We stood at the altar before the five nandies and Mrs Neide reverently replaced the old brass lamp on its pedestal. She was weeping, and I could see she was praying. Then we returned in silence to the car.

Neide was sound asleep. Involuntarily, I stretched out my hand to touch his forehead. He was perspiring profusely, the sweat running down his forehand and cheeks. The fever had left him, and he was quite cool to my touch. Helped by his wife, I tucked the blanket more closely around him, wound up the glass windows to prevent a draught, and instructed the driver to take him back to the hotel at Ootacamund.

For there was no need to go to the hospital. Neide was cured. There were tears of joy on his wife's face as the taxi drove away.

That, my readers, is exactly what happened. You may offer any explanations you like. Autosuggestion? I will not argue with you. All I know is that it happened!

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Another curious incident that I witnessed recently at a hamlet within half a mile of Mavanhalla settlement, which is exactly fifteen miles from Ootacamund, was a case of avowed black magic.

A comely girl living in the hamlet was engaged to be married to man living in the village of Garupalli, twelve miles away. In India couples do not get engaged of their own volition. These things are arranged for them by the parents of both parties, who barter and bargain till they arrive at a settlement. Normally, the principal parties do not even see each other till they are actually married. But in this case there was a difference. The man and his parents visited Mavanhalla. He saw the girl and approved of her, and the date of the wedding was tentatively set.

These people are known as Irilas, and it is their custom for the man's parents to pay the girl's parents a certain sum of money for her hand in marriage. In plain words, they purchase her. This is different from the normal Indian custom of dowry, whereby the girl's parents are required to put down an agreed sum.

In this case, however, the boy's parents at the last moment said they could not, or would not, pay. The girl's parents, in a rage, broke

off the engagement and found another candidate willing to pay the price they had fixed for their daughter.

Then things happened. The Garupalli lad, furious at being turned down, and mad with jealousy, walked through the jungle for a distance of over a hundred miles to the town of Kollegal, near the banks of the Cauvery river, where lived a black magician of very great and evil repute. He had to spend money through the nose, for the magician made him buy a whole sheep for sacrifice, its blood being offered to the spirit which was now to take a hand in matters, while its flesh went to the magician. The unholy ceremony was performed at three in the morning of the night of the full moon.

A hundred miles away the girl was sleeping in the hamlet near Mavanhalla when, at precisely three that morning, she awoke with a pain in her stomach and hastened outside the hut to answer the call of nature. A few yards to the rear of each hut is the spot where the inhabitants usually go for this purpose.

She reported that she had finished and was just coming away when two unknown men materialized as if from nowhere, laid hold of her sari, and urged her to come at once with them to Gorupalli. Sensing that this was a ploy by her late betrothed to entice her away, the girl said she would try to come as soon as it was daylight. To this the men replied that she should come immediately, when the girl said that the distance was too great. At this they offered to carry her.

The exchange of words had reached this stage when the girl happened to look down. Horror gripped her when she noticed that neither of the men had feet; at least their feet did not touch the ground, which she could plainly see in the brilliant moonlight. Rather, she could see the ground in the brilliant moonlight, but no feet where there should have been feet!

She screamed after that. The men vanished and people came tumbling out of their huts in response to her yells. She told them what had happened, but the neighbours thought she had had a nightmare, for no men were to be seen.

The girl was upset for the rest of that day and would not eat, but at the usual time of about 7.30 p.m., sat down for her supper, a simple meal of curry and rice. In the usual way she fashioned with her right hand a ball of rice and curry and put it into her mouth. Then her mouth burned as if on fire and the food appeared to become hard. In a panic she spat it out. But what came out of her mouth and into the plate was a stone.

This sort of thing continued for eight days. Then I happened to visit Mavanhalla and was told about it. Apparently the girl could eat her morning meal undisturbed, and also at any other time of the day. The phenomenon occurred only after sundown, when she attempted to

eat her supper.

Being always interested in things unusual, I hastened to the hamlet, where I saw the girl and her parents and spoke to them. I spoke also to the neighbours; in fact nearly every adult in that settlement. They had all witnessed the phenomenon and told me the story that I have just related. The father had collected these stones and some other miscellaneous articles that the girl had spat out. I asked him to give them to me, which he did, and they are before me as I write. The items are as follows: stones of various sizes and shapes—six items, the largest weighing three ounces; broken bits of pottery—six items; charcoal—two pieces; lastly, a piece of broken bottle-glass.

As I have said, the time for these phenomena to occur was at the evening meal. So I returned just after seven o'clock that evening to witness things for myself.

The girl was lying on the ground in a sort of daze, with more than a dozen people around her. Her face was damp with sweat, and every little while her mouth would work, twist and pout, as if something was inside.

By nature I am sceptic. The thought came to me that the girl was putting on an act and the reason seemed simple enough. She wanted to marry the man at Garupalli and had invented the whole story. In the course of the day she herself, or perhaps an accomplice acting for her, would procure a stone or a piece of tile in advance and conceal it somewhere on her person. This object the girl would put into her mouth some time before the evening meal and keep it there till the time she spit the object out, together with the food. So I determined that I would expose her trickery before all the people who had gathered around her.

I told her to open her mouth widely. She did so. I had brought my torch with me, as it was dark outside. I shone the torch into her mouth. Nothing appeared to be there. Suddenly, and without asking her permission, and risking a bite from her, I thrust my forefinger beneath her tongue to see if anything was hidden there, then into both the cavities formed between her cheeks and jaws, holding her firmly with my left hand by the back of her neck in order that my probing finger would find the stone I was convinced was hidden in her mouth.

The girl choked, but surprisingly enough did not struggle or protest. Rather, she appeared to be going to sleep. There was nothing in her mouth and finally I released her. The working and pouting and twisting of her mouth stopped after that, and time passed.

In about half-an-hour her evening meal was brought to her. She sat up to eat it, stretching forth her hand to take the first mouthful, but I stopped her. Calling to her mother, I asked the old woman to break up the rice in the girl's hand as the thought came to me that a stone

might be concealed in the rice or curry.

The girl stretched out her hand again, took up the grains we had examined between her fingers, mixed them with the curry, made a small ball of them and put it into her mouth. Then she started to chew. Everything was normal. I smiled to myself in satisfaction. The vixen has not been able to dodge me.

The next instant I heard it. A jarring, crunching sound as the girl's moving teeth came down on some hard object in her mouth. The look of abject terror that came into her face was genuine enough. I could see fear in her eyes, genuine fear, not assumed. With a muffled scream she spat the object out. A stone fell with a dull plop into the earthen plate containing the curry and rice.

At that moment I shouted to her to open her mouth, seized the back of her neck again with my left hand, and thrust my right forefinger into her mouth. Believe it or not. There was not a grain of rice or food of any sort in her mouth! The mouthful she had just taken had vanished entirely. The stone had taken its place!

Now the girl had not the time to chew the food, nor could she have swallowed it, for I had been watching intently all the time. To swallow a fistful of rice and curry requires a visible swallowing movement of the muscles of the mouth, throat and gullet. There had been nothing of that sort. The stone she spat out that evening is the one weighing three ounces which is now before me.

But the story does not end there. I witnessed the same thing the next evening. Once more I looked into the girl's mouth and searched carefully for any hidden object as she began to eat her food. As if to reward my diligence, the piece of broken bottle-glass, with jagged edges, emerged this time. It also lies before me as I write. How the broken edges did not cut her tongue and mouth I do not know. And once again there was not a grain of food left in her mouth after the glass had dropped out. This time a larger crowd of people than ever before witnessed the incident.

News of these happenings, as may well be imagined, had spread far and wide, and the next afternoon a healer arrived. He was an Indian of about my own age, a Christian, and an unpretentious individual. I had gone a little early to the girl's hut that evening, for I was still curious and wanted to see this thing once more for my own satisfaction. The strange Indian was squatting at the door when I arrived. He rose and smiled affably. Speaking softly and in faultless English, he introduced himself and said he was on a visit to Ootacamund. He had heard about the girl there and had come down by the evening bus, walking the three miles alone through the jungle from the village of Masinigudi, where the bus had dropped him.

Very modestly, but with strange self-confidence, he claimed that

God had given him the power of healing and that he had come to heal the girl. Rather taken aback, I am afraid I spoke somewhat caustically.

'What you mean is, you have come to try to heal her!'

'No, sir, I have come to heal her. I was impelled to come from Ootacamund for this purpose. God will not fail, sir. He cannot.'

I felt rather sheepish, faced with such simple confidence, and said nothing. Then this stranger, who had introduced himself by the simple Indian name of Puttaswamy, began to question the girl and her parents. In a short while these, together with several of the bystanders who had witnessed the phenomenon on many occasions, told the whole story. Finally I told him of my own experiences on the two preceding days.

By this time the girl had begun to perspire and her mouth had begun to work. The symptoms I had seen twice before were starting. Puttaswamy sat beside her and said nothing. Hie eyes were closed and his lips were moving faintly. He appeared to be muttering to himself—perhaps he was praying.

Once again, regardless of the healer's presence, I made the girl open her mouth and examined it more carefully than ever before, looking down her throat questing with my finger beneath her tongue, between her jaws and cheeks, everywhere I possibly could. Very definitely there was nothing concealed in her mouth.

Then came the final act in this strange drama. The evening meal was brought to the girl in the form of the usual rice and curry, for the Irilas knew no other. The girl made and put the ball of food in her mouth and started to chew. Peremptorily the silence was broken by Puttaswamy. In a strangely confident, loud voice, he cried:

'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whoever you are, I command you, come out of her!'

There came the unmistakable crack and crunch of stone in the girl's mouth. She screamed and rolled on the ground in a frenzy as if in an epileptic fit, tearing her hair and grinding her teeth. Puttaswamy knelt beside her. His eyes were like coals and were moist with emotion. Once again he cried:

'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, leave her this instant!'

The girl was violently convulsed, bending backwards as if in the throes of tetanus. She spat out the rice and curry she had taken. A horrid screech came from her throat. She shuddered, then was still. A few minutes later she moved again. Gently Puttaswamy sat her up. There was no stone in her mouth—only a few grains of rice and curry.

Softly, but quivering with deep emotion and joy, Puttaswamy said, 'Thank you, Jesus.'

The girl was cured. Instinctively we all knew it for we could feel the power that radiated from this strange and simple man.

I saw these for myself and know they are true!

✲ ✲ ✲

The man I am now going to tell you about was a dacoit—a thief and murderer of nine people!

The story began many years ago. The man's name was Selvaraj. The police records described him as: 'aged 36 years; height 5 feet 7 inches; of average dark complexion; usually sporting a heavy, twirled moustache reaching almost to his temple; has a distinctly protruding upper lip and a scar reaching from the corner of his right eye to the lobe of his right ear.'

The trouble started with a family feud. Selvaraj's father had quarrelled with a neighbour. The latter assembled a gang of relatives, waylaid the elderly man one night, murdered him and tied the corpse to a tree bordering the highway for everyone to see as an example the following morning.

Selvaraj was a young man then. He knew about the feud, but had contrived to keep himself aloof. But the cruel murder of his father was too much for him. With his brother to assist, and five others, the seven avengers raided the home of the murderers and hacked all nine of them to death with wood-choppers.

There was a hue and cry after that, the cause of mass murders and the identity of the perpetrators being well known. Three of Selvaraj's relatives, who had assisted him, were caught, convicted and hanged. He, his brother and two others went into hiding.

The feud spread and police help was not asked by either side. The relations of the nine men who had been killed came to find out where Selvaraj, his brother and the two others were hiding. As usual, it was because of a woman that the information leaked out. Selvaraj's brother had taken up with another man's wife and was living with her, along with Selvaraj and the other two men. The aggrieved husband gave the information to the relations of the nine men. They came at night with petrol and set fire to the hut in which their enemies were sleeping. The brother and the woman were burned to death, while Selvaraj and his two companions escaped.

The police came again, arrested the avengers, and got two of them convicted and hanged. Both sides had now gone into hiding in the forest, afraid of the police and thirsting for each other's blood.

Bereft of all his possessions, lands and livelihood, Selvaraj had to live somehow. He could not earn an honest living in any town because the police would arrest him on sight, so force of circumstances compelled him to turn to robbery, but even this he tried to do in an honourable way, if one can associate such a term with crime.

Selvaraj became a dacoit, a sort of Robin Hood of South India. He robbed the rich to feed the poor. Landlords, wealthy business men, shopkeepers and thriving merchants were his prey, but he kept only a portion of his extortions for his own maintenance. The rest he gave away to the maimed, the poor, the sick and the needy. So much so, indeed, that there was a sharp division of feeling about him. The large majority of people, including the farmers and poor ryots, loved and respected him. The small majority of the rich, and of course the police, feared and hated him intensely.

Selvaraj, at about this time, began to acquire a nickname. He had a protruding upper lip and became known as 'Mumptyvayan' meaning 'the man with a mouth like a 'Mumpty.' 'Mumpty' is the local name for a shovel. He lived entirely in the jungle and his domain was here, there and everywhere, over an extent of many miles, ranging from the banks of the Cauvery river into the eastern portion of the district of Kollegal, into Salem district, up Doddahalla or the Secret river and across the mountains to the Chinar river and the outskirts of the town of Pennagram.

He appeared and disappeared like the Scarlet Pimpernel, and the authorities could never catch him. Like Man Singh, the notorious dacoit who ranged the fastnesses of the Chambal valley of Rajasthan in the north of India, Mumptyavayan in the south was equally loved by the poor who inhabited the forest regions and their borders. The authorities could never gain information regarding his whereabouts and could not lay hands on him. On the other hand, people would inform him about the movements of the police when the latter sent armed squads periodically into the jungles to try to catch up with him.

Mumptyavayan's *modus operandi* was simple. From a host of willing informers he would gain information about the sources of income of landlords and merchants. Mysteriously he would then appear at dead of night in the homes of these gentry, threaten them with knife and gun, and make away with the large sums of money they would hurriedly hand over to him in order to save their lives.

Another thing he did was collecting money from timber thieves. At dead of night these poachers would bring lorries and a gang of workers to some quiet corner of the jungle, hack down a tree, cut it up into sections, load the wood on to their vehicles, and disappear before dawn. But just at the crucial moment, as the engine was being started, Mumptyvayan would appear at the driver's cab, his gun pointed at the people inside, and demand fifty rupees as the price of his silence. Invariably the sum was paid.

But on one occasion the enterprising driver engaged his gears and tried to make a run for it. Mumptyvayan did not shoot the man; he shot at both the rear tyres in quick succession. The driver paid up

after that. He was put out of business too, for the lorry carried only one spare wheel. Daylight came before the party could go to town and return with a second spare. The poachers tried to off-load the lorry and hide all the timber they had stolen, but they were discovered, arrested and sent to jail, while the lorry was confiscated. In any event, each tyre cost Rs. 600 and the dacoit had only asked for Rs. 50. Mumptyvayan gained much prestige after this incident, while the poacher greatly regretted having refused his reasonable demand.

From reports that were made to the police, it was estimated that Mumptyvayan collected Rs 25,000 a year by robbery, on an average, but the figure could be doubled to include amounts that were taken by him but not reported to the police, as Mumptyvayan was astute enough to rob many whose activities were such as to make it inconvenient, if not impossible, for them to seek police aid.

He invariably worked alone for, very wisely, he distrusted accomplices. His usual costume was a Khaki shirt, rather ragged khaki shorts, a belt around his waist to which a huge knife was strapped on the left side and a dagger on the right, a cartridge-belt across his shoulder, filled with home-loaded 12 bore cartridges, both ball and shot, while he carried an old but well-kept harmless .12 bore Geco gun that he had stolen. Sometimes he wore a green turban to simulate the uniform of a Forest Guard, but generally was bareheaded.

Mumptyvayan was extraordinarily courteous to women, of whom he was, unfortunately for himself, rather overfond. His legal wife lived at the village of Mecheri, ten miles from the Mettur Dam, and he never forgot her in spite of his many concubines who ranged, like his activities, all over the jungle. For six months the police watched the wife's house at Mecheri and still the husband visited her. He came once, disguised as a woman and all covered up; the police only knew about it after he had left.

A month later another muffled figure approached. The police pounced on this one, knocked it down and fastened handcuffs on hands and feet. But to their chagrin, and the open derision of all the villagers who had turned out to enjoy the fun, this figure turned out to be a real woman. She abused the police, but also grinned widely and admitted that Mumptyvayan had sent her to make of them a laughing-stock.

This incident appears to have increased the vagabond's confidence in himself and he regarded the custodians of law and order with contempt, for overnight a notice appeared on the gate of the police station, duly signed by the dacoit, intimating a week in advance that he would visit that very village on a particular day. Two wagons, loaded with constables were rushed to Mecheri and every one of the men was ordered to learn, by heart, a description of the rogue so as to

be able to recognize him on sight.

Nobody answering to the description put in an appearance, but at the time of the midday meal a rather troublesome mendicant, without a vestige of hair on head or face and who had met with an accident and lost his right eye, turned up at the police station and begged for food from the constables who were squatting on the verandah and eating their food. One or two of the more kindly-natured gave him a fistful of rice, but the others kicked him out unceremoniously.

Later, they found that a small aluminium tiffin carrier belonging to one of them was missing. The beggar must have taken it—for all beggars are thieves! At dawn, two mornings later, a bleary-eyed policeman found the tiffin-carrier at the gate of the police station. Inside it was a note from Mumptyvayan thanking the owner for the loan of the carrier.

Greatly incensed at this, the authorities are rumoured to have sent about 300 armed policemen, in gangs of fifty, to scour the jungles and bring the dacoit in, dead or alive. They were particularly enjoined to be very alert in dealing with him because, shortly after the tiffin-carrier incident, the rascal had purloined a rifle from a landlord whose house he had raided, although the weapon had had no ammunition with it and it was felt the dacoit would not be in a position to secure any.

While the police were out in the forest searching for him, Mumptyvayan came to town and visited a travelling cinema that had come to the large village of Pennagram. He sat through the show till it was half over, then visited the box-office and relieved the cashier of all the evening's takings. The cashier pleaded that he would be sacked and jailed, as the management would say he had invented the story in order to take the money himself. So the chivalrous dacoit, seeing his point, hastily scribbled a note certifying that it was he, Mumptyvayan, who had taken the money and not the cashier. He also gave the latter a five rupee note from the takings to buy himself a good meal at the local hotel before news of the robbery was given to the owner and trouble began.

The very next morning he visited the largest shop in the hamlet of Uttaimalai, eleven miles away, and relieved the owner of sixty-three rupees. On that occasion he appears to have been wearing a black muffler, closely wrapped around his neck and up to his ears, and an overcoat, from beneath which he produced two straight double-edged daggers, holding one in each hand to frighten the shopkeeper into silence.

About this time a jail guard, whose home town was the same village of Pennagram, but who had been working at the prison situated in the city of Salem, was dismissed. He returned to his home

at Pennagram very disgruntled and heard there about the recent exploits of Mumptyvayan and how anxious the police were to lay hands on him. The thought came to this ex-guard that, with a little subterfuge, he might be able to find the dacoit and gain his confidence; then he could go to the police and make a bargain in advance. A promise would have to be made to reinstate him in his old job at Salem prison, in return for which he would deliver the dacoit, duly fettered, to the police.

With commendable cunningness the ex-jailer pursued his plan. He gave out that he was an aggrieved man who wanted to work for the dacoit and give him information as to where easy money was to be had from the rich landlords and merchants of Salem city. This news was carried to Mumptyvayan in due course and the dacoit fell for the story. Through an agent he contacted the man and had a preliminary talk with him. It was arranged that they should meet again under a certain tree at a secret place near the cattleshed of Panapatti, about eight miles from Pennagram, at ten the following night and come to an understanding. The man hurriedly informed the police at Pennagram, who planned to swoop on the rendezvous at 10.30 p.m., next day, by which time the dacoit was to have been securely fettered. The police also promised to see that the informer was reinstated as jailer at Salem.

Promptly at 10 p.m. the next night the two men met and sat down to talk. Unfortunately, the ex-jailer was rather careless and allowed the handcuffs, which the police had lent him, to clank against a stone as he sat on the ground. Mumptyvayan's sharp ears caught the sound and he became suspicious.

'What have you got there that sounds like iron brother?' he asked.

This,' replied the ex-jailer and, realizing that the game was up, leaped upon the dacoit at once. Both men were well-built, powerful individuals and a terrific battle was fought in silence, neither side asking nor giving any quarter as they struggled upon the ground like beasts.

Then, for the second time that evening, the stone on the ground aided Mumptyavayan. The ex-jailer was sitting astride him, trying to choke him to death, when the dacoit felt the stone sticking into his side. Gripping it in his right fist, Mumptyvayan smashed it against the side of his antagonist's head. Momentarily stunned, the ex-jailer tumbled off and the dacoit in turn got on top. Once more the struggle began, but Mumptyvayan had his dagger out by now. As his adversary reached up to grapple with him again, a quick slash of the razor-sharp weapon severed three of the man's fingers. He screamed with pain, realizing that the dacoit, in his fury, would kill him for his duplicity. He begged for mercy and said he was sorry for what he had attempted

to do.

Just then, Mumptyvayan heard the sound of the approaching police van. He disappeared in the darkness of the forest, leaving the would-be police agent rolling on the ground while trying to staunch the jets of blood that spurted from his injured hand.

The dacoit became a little more cautious after this incident. He disappeared from the jungles for three or four months and was heard of in the towns of Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri, where he robbed shops and people on a petty scale. He also filched a pair of binoculars from the owner of a car three miles out of Dharmapuri. Then Mumptyvayan came back to his old haunts, and the manner of his return was dramatic.

The Superintendent of Police and his family went down to the Hogenaikal Waterfalls on the Cauvery river on a Sunday, to enjoy a picnic and a bath beneath the waterfall. They had left their jeep scarcely a hundred yards away. After completing their ablutions, they ate a picnic lunch and returned to the vehicle to find that the camera that had been left there had been stolen. Scribbled upon the grey paint of the jeep, in chalk, and in five separate places, were these words in the Tamil dialect: 'Mymptyvayan, the rajah of dacoits!'

During my visits to these areas from time to time, I had of course heard many tales of Mumptyvayan and his exploits. The early incidents in his history had aroused my sympathy, but this to a large extent disappeared when I learned of his more mundane actions and the thefts he had committed. I then regarded him as a complete rogue. But when I heard from the police of his daring, his sense of humour and his undeniable bravery, I confess I became attracted by this personality and entertained a great desire to meet him.

One day I brought a party of friends on a fishing expedition to Hogenaikal and found much excitement prevailing at that otherwise peaceful and sleepy hamlet. Mumptyvayan had struck again, and dramatically.

For at about this time an engineer from the government of Madras state had been commissioned to explore the possibility of constructing a dam across the river above the waterfalls, and survey work of every kind was in progress. Just a mile upstream, at a point where the actual construction was contemplated, a camp site had been made and over a hundred labourers were engaged in building a road, drilling holes and helping generally with the survey work. A shed had been erected for the engineer and his associates. A payroll centre had been established, and a clerk had arrived to pay the labourers at the end of each week.

So had Mumptyvayan just two days earlier and he had relieved the pay-clerk of Rs 350 from the pay for the following week without touching an anna of the pay for the week just completed and about to

be paid out to the labourers.

Not content with his exploit, he had tapped upon the door of the quarters where the Inspector of Fisheries lived at the neighbouring hamlet of Uttaimalai, a mile away, announcing he was the forest guard and had urgent news of the presence of fish poachers. The Inspector opened the door to find Mumptyvayan, but no forest guard. In a flash the dacoit had stepped within and closed the front door. Then, drawing his usual two double-edged daggers, he had intimidated the official. Luckily there were only Rs. 51 in the house at the time and all of this was handed over to the dacoit.

I met the Fisheries Inspector, and then the engineer, who allowed me to talk to the pay-clerk, and they confirmed the tales I had heard.

But at the moment I was more concerned about the dam than the exploits of the bandit. A dam here would mean the destruction by inundation of thousands of acres of jungle. There would be the erection of quarters for the staff and the township that would follow in the wake of the dam. The whole hamlet of Uttaimalai, including the little hut I had built and owned there for over twenty years, would disappear beneath the water.

I questioned the engineer regarding these things and he very kindly offered to take me around in his jeep and show me exactly where the construction might begin. I accepted his invitation gladly. A third man then joined us, carrying what at first seemed to be a service rifle. He was bareheaded, with a white *dhoti* around his waist and a khaki shirt hanging over it. Great ammunition boots without socks adorned his feet.

As we drove off, I asked the engineer who the armed man might be. He grinned and replied that the man was a police guard deputed to accompany him whenever he went into the jungle, for fear of what was generally thought that he would certainly be robbed by the dacoit, if not captured and held to ransom. Actually my friend seemed to be enjoying the situation.

Very soon we reached the site of the projected dam, alighted and wandered down the river bank together, followed by the armed policeman, who thumped over the river stones in his great boots or dragged them through the soft river sand. Winking to the engineer, I opened a conversation with the policeman, asking him about the dacoit. The man soon gave voice to his pent-up feeling. He was a government servant, he admitted, but the government consisted of fools. Fancy deputing him, single-handed, with a ridiculous weapon such as he held in his hands, to guard so august a personage as the engineer against such a notorious person as Mumptyvayan!

I asked what was wrong with the rifle. The policeman spat with disdain, unslung the weapon from his shoulder, and handed it to me

contemptuously.

'It's not a rifle at all, although made to look like one,' he asserted. 'It's only a gun.'

I took the weapon from him and was surprised to find it was only a .410 shotgun with a wooden casing to make it look like a .303 service rifle. The policeman then opened the leather pouch on his belt and showed me ten rounds of ammunition for the weapon. They were merely .410 cartridges.

'With this pea-shooter,' he continued bitterly, 'the government expects me to guard this great man and outshoot this rascal Mumptyvayan, who is a marksman, as everyone knows.'

'Besides,' he went on, 'these rounds won't carry for more than fifty yards. Mumpty has only to sit on a rock sixty yards away and laugh at me, and I can't do anything about it. From there he can kill me, and the engineer *sahib*, as full of holes as a sieve. Bah! Thoo!' and he spat again venomously.

Keeping a serious face, I asked, 'What will you do, then, my friend, if Mumpty should suddenly appear from behind yonder rock or tree?'

With a start, the policeman looked up fearfully at the big rock and the phalanx of trees beyond it, some seventy-five yards away. In a burst of confidence, he addressed both of us.

'Sirs, I'm a family man. I have a wife and six children, the youngest yet a baby. Who will feed them if this bastard kills me? Forgive me, sirs; but if he should appear this instant I shall down this toy gun and run away.'

We laughed to ease his embarrassment when he realized he had said the wrong thing, and I added, 'Please pass the word to everyone to tell this character Mumptyvayan that Anderson *dorai* is looking forward to meeting him some day.'

Three or four months had passed after this incident when I went to my twelve-acre plot of land on the banks of the Chinar river, a dozen miles upstream from the point where this river joins the Cauvery river at Hogenaikal, to camp for a few days. I had allowed my old friend and *shikari*, Ranga, of whom I have spoken in other stories, to live on this land and cultivate it for himself, and in his usual manner he urged me to spend the time with him in the hut he had erected at one corner of the land, rather than pitch the tent I had brought along with me, and usually occupied, at quite another spot.

Tor there's a bad elephant about, *dorai,*' he urged. 'It sometimes prowls around at night. Seeing your tent, it may trample upon it you before you can wake.'

'Bad elephant?' I queried. 'How extraordinary! The Forestry department has not told me of any such creature.'

It was midsummer. Everything was bone-dry, and the jungle like

timber. There was a not a drop of water in the Chinar river. This was scarcely the time of year for an elephant to be around. Elephants would keep strictly to the banks of the Cauvery river, the only place for many miles where water was to be found.

'Are you quite certain?' I asked again, and suspicion lurked in my tone.

Ranga tried to avoid my gaze. The he spoke in a whisper. 'Mumptyvayan is here,' he confided. 'He came to my hut by moonlight last night and spoke to me. He's known to me, and will not harm you if you stay with me, *dorai*. But if you stay alone—who knows? He may rob you! He may kill you! Who can tell?'

'That's just wonderful.' I exclaimed in ecstasy. 'I have for long wanted to meet this character. Just you go and tell him to come along to my tent tonight. I'd like to speak to him.'

Ranga feigned surprise and indignation. 'Why should I?' he asked. 'Am I the friend of a dacoit?'

'You are,' I affirmed 'just that. But have no fear, I won't tell anyone.'

So we pitched my tent at the corner of the land where I usually camped. That night, till about 10 p.m., I had a long talk with Ranga beside the camp fire and then retired, while he walked back to his hut at the other end of the plot. I remember that I did not leave the lantern burning, for it usually attracts mosquitoes, which are plentiful in that area. The moonlight made everything almost as bright as day, and I could clearly discern the heavy belt of trees, nearly a quarter of a mile away, that marked the course of the Chinar river. I fell asleep still thinking of the dacoit.

Suddenly I awoke. No sound had disturbed me, but I knew that I was no longer alone. The figure of a man stood at the entrance of my tent, brilliantly lit from head to foot by the moonlight. With both hands he held a shotgun at waist level, the weapon pointed directly at me. A khaki shirt overhung a ragged pair of short, and strapped to the man's belt were two long, wicked-looking daggers, one on either hip. Crosswise from one shoulder was strapped a cartridge-belt, the brass heads of the .12 gauge rounds winking in the moonlight. Across the other shoulder hung a pair of binoculars in leather case! A scarf was wound around his head like a turban, but I could see the enormous black moustache that curled upwards to his temples. Brown, rubber-soled shoes were on his feet.

I blinked and rubbed my eyes, but he was still there. My watch showed that it was exactly 2 a.m.

I sat up and spoke joyously: 'Welcome Mumptyvayan! I've wanted to speak to you for a long time.'

'This is no time to talk, white man. I mean business.' He spoke

truculently, in a harsh tone. 'Don't attempt to run, or cry out, or I'll kill you. Just come out of your tent and stand here in the moonlight, where I can keep an eye on you, while I collect your rifle, gun and money. I want all three.'

I was disappointed. I had been looking forward to meeting this fellow, but our meeting was not going to be the pleasant one I had hoped it might be. Well, if he wanted it that way, he could certainly have it.

'Mumptyvayan,' I replied sternly, not attempting to move from where I sat, 'I had been looking forward to meeting you and to talking to you as a friend. I've heard of your exploits and I confess I admired some of them, but not all. At least, I thought you were a brave man. Now I'm disappointed—greatly disappointed. For you're a coward, a braggart, and a bluffer!'

The man choked with rage. 'Do not provoke me too far, white man,' he hissed, 'or—.'

'Look, Mumpty,' I interrupted firmly, but with my heart in my mouth. 'You can't get away with it. You know that. You know very well you are bluffing. For you dare not shoot me! As it is, the price upon your head is too high. If you murder a white man just to rob him, the government will really come down upon you with a heavy hand. They'll send the *paltanwallahs* (soldiers) here. They will scour every corner of the jungle till they ferret you out like a jackal. Then they'll kill you, like a rat! Besides, I had hoped to be your friend. I had looked forward to meeting you. What a pity things have ended in this way.'

It was a game of bluff. On my part and on his. Nevertheless, fear gripped my heart. This man had murdered many people already. Would he shoot me like a dog? Perhaps kill me with one of his great knives? I could see that he was a man of tremendous physique.

He knew I was bluffing, but I was not quite certain how far he was bluffing. I only wished I knew. He overrated me, for he was certain that I was certain he was bluffing, and the next second his actions confirmed this.

For Mumptyvayan grounded the butt of his gun and leaned upon the weapon. Then he spoke in a changed voice:

'*Dorai*, you're a strange man, indeed, and the first one who has not begged for mercy. A man after my own heart. Do you give me your word of honour that you won't try to arrest me or harm me? Will you promise that you'll tell nobody, not even our friend Ranga, that we met tonight?'

'I promise, most willingly, Mumpty,' I said in genuine relief, getting up and walking out into the moonlight. 'Let's shake hands on it.'

The dacoit laid his gun on the ground and very solemnly we shook hands. It would have been a strange sight to a watcher, to see this fierce and ragged multi-murderer vigorously shaking the hand of a white man in blue-and-white pyjamas, whose heart was still beating abnormally fast.

We squatted on the ground there, and we talked and talked. I was clear from the beginning that this poor fellow wanted the company of someone to whom he might talk freely, someone to whom he could pour out his heart. And he did just that. He told me his whole life story, every detail. When he began talking there was pride and boastfulness in his words, but as he proceeded a certain wistfulness crept in. I could see that he was genuinely sorry for all that had happened, that he was genuinely repentant. Mumpytyvayan was earnestly looking for a way out. I was deeply moved by his words and I wanted to help him all I could.

He came to the end of his story at last, and silence fell upon us for quite some time. Looking straight into his face in the moonlight, I began to speak:

Two wrongs don't make a right, Mumpty,' I said. 'They never have; they never will. Just because those wicked men murdered your father you did not acquire the right to murder them. However, the harm has been done now. I think you can see that for yourself and you'll admit it, eh?'

The dacoit nodded in silence.

So I continued. The proper thing for me to do is to advise you to give yourself up, but I am not so sure it would be practical advice so far as your interests are concerned. You would probably be hanged; come to think of it, I'm sure you would be. If I were to advise you to continue as your are doing, it would be bad advice, Mumpty. For every man's hand is against you….'

But here the dacoit interrupted vehemently. 'What about my friends, *dorai?*' he protested impetuously. 'What about my many informers, who tell me so many things, including every movement of the police? They even told me about you!'

Then in a burst of confidence he admitted: 'The policeman who escorted the engineer told a constable that you wanted to meet me. That constable passed the message to me, for once I befriended his father, who is very poor. And so he gives information to me about the movements of his brother policemen. Even Ranga is my friend.'

I tried another line of persuasion. 'Don't you feel lonely at times, Mumpty? Don't you long for human companionship? A person to whom you might talk, to whom you may pour out your heart just as you're doing at this moment, to me? How many could you trust to talk to in this way?'

'Indeed I do, *dorai,*' he responded wistfully. 'I realize that inside myself I am most unhappy, most miserable, most lonely. But tell me what I can do!'

I was deeply touched by the man's quite evident sincerity, by the magnitude of the problem confronting him. Silence fell between us as I thought awhile. Then all of a sudden it came to me. I felt I had the solution.

'You can do this, Mumptyvayan. Go to the Cauvery river at night. Throw your rifle, your gun, all the ammunition, your knives, the glasses you stole, everything, into the "Big Bannu," the pool below the Hogenaikal Falls where the water is perhaps 200 feet deep. They will never be seen again. Keep nothing you now have, even your clothes, for they will incriminate you. Throw everything into the "Big Bannu".

'Remove your moustache and hair. On second thoughts, burn your khakhi clothes and shoes and don't throw them in the river, for they might float. Then walk to Biligundu and onwards to Dodda Halla. Traverse this stream three miles above the place where it reaches the Cauvery and go through the Tagatti forest to the town of Oregaum. Keep straight on, and you will soon cross the Madras state frontier and enter Mysore state. The police there will not know you. You will arrive at a main road eventually. Turn to your right then, and inquire the way to the town of Kankanhalli. Thirty-three miles north of Kankanhalli is the city of Bangalore, where I live. If you reach Bangalore and come to me there, I will help you further.

'It will take you some days to do this journey on foot. Don't ever let your hair or moustache grow again for if you do, you'll certainly be recognized. Try to get work along the way. The money you earn will help you. Don't carry too much money from here or it will make people suspicious. I will give you my address at Bangalore.'

'Money I have enough of, *dorai,*' he assured me, 'but write your address on a piece of paper, so that I may find you easily at Bangalore.'

I shook my head sadly. 'That I will not do, Mumpty. For, if you are caught and my address found on your person in my handwriting, I shall be in serious trouble. However, I'll give you clear instruction. Memorize them. Okay?'

Mumpty nodded, and I proceeded.

'My name is Anderson. Ask for "Anderson *dorai.*" Repeat the name each day to yourself so that you don't forget it.'

He repeated my name several times. Then I proceeded. 'I live next to the "Tamasha Bangla" (the Museum), close to the statue of the "Great White Queen!" Queen Victoria). Remember that. When you reach Bangalore, ask the way to the statue of the "Great White Queen" and the "Tamasha Bangla" which is close to it. In between is a big red

house. That's where I live. Anderson *dorai*. Got it? Now keep repeating these directions to yourself, several times a day, so as to be sure you won't forget.'

We were both sitting on the ground, as I told you, and the dacoit threw himself forward touching my feet. This big man was crying like a child.

'*Dorai*, You are my father and my mother' he cried, 'the only real friend I have in this whole world. And to think that only a little while ago I wanted to kill you. I will do as you say.'

There was a strange lump in my throat as I tried to remain calm while patting his matted hair. The muffler he had been wearing as a turban had unwound itself and lay on the ground.

When he began to regain control I raised him to a sitting position, placed a hand on each shoulder and, looking into his eyes, said earnestly:

'You must go now, my friend. You've not realized it, but it's past five o'clock. The junglecocks are crowing and the moonlight wanes before the coming sun. Soon dawn will break, and nobody should see you here. Be brave now, my friend; be determined; be true to yourself and to me and do as I have said. And may Krishna be with you till we meet again.'

Impetuously he dropped to his knees, bent to kiss my feet. Then he scrambled to his feet, *salaamed*, picked up his gun.

The next instant Mumptyvayan the dacoit had vanished into the fading moonlight. I was alone. Or so I thought. For within a couple of minutes my old friend and companion, Ranga, stood before me.

The *dorai* does not appear to have slept soundly,' he inquired. There are dark circles under his eyes. I trust no elephant disturbed him, or was it just the mosquitoes?'

The man could be very annoying at times and I was in no mood for banter.

'I slept soundly enough,' I countered, cutting him short, 'and you know very well that I'm an early riser.'

Ranga coughed, then continued in a casual tone. 'Perhaps I ate too much last night, for I appear to have been dreaming since the early hours of this morning. In my dream I saw two figures sitting in the moonlight, before this very tent. One of them was you, *dorai;* the other was a man in khaki and he carried a gun. You just talked and talked. Wasn't it a strange dream, *dorai?*'

So he had been watching us all the time! Abruptly I swung around and thrust my face forward, almost touching his.

'It was a strange dream, indeed,' I said fiercely. 'But it was only a dream. Only a dream. Remember that always, Ranga. And now, forget about this dream. Don't ever talk about it again. For if you do—to me,

or to any other man—our friendship that has lasted for over thirty-five years is over!'

In a changed voice, he spoke cheerfully. 'I slept soundly last night, *dorai*. Nor did I even dream after all that heavy dinner.'

I smiled and laid my hand on his arm, and he smiled in return. Our long friendship was to continue.

Often did I think of Mumptyvayan after that night and nearly three months passed. Then one day I had finished lunch at home when the dogs barked. My Alsatian, followed by a little woolly nondescript about one-tenth its size, dashed out of the back door. They were barking at a mendicant, one of the many that present themselves almost every day at everybody's house in India.

This beggar was leaning on a staff. He was bald headed and clean-shaven, wore only a dirty loin-cloth and an ancient, broken pair of sandals and large, rounded glasses. Around his neck hung a necklace of wooden beads, each the size of a walnut and covered with grime. Smeared horizontally across his forehead from temple to temple were white and red caste marks alternately.

His coal-black eyes looked at me haughtily, even disdainfully. Almost with contempt he asked, 'Can any charity be expected in the abode of a white man?'

Impertinent blackguard! I felt like throwing him out. I advanced threateningly, my intention to abuse him roundly. The proud black eyes stared back into mine. Then I noticed that, beneath the white and red caste marks, a scar extended from his right eye to his temple, only visible when one came near enough to see it.

Mumptyvayan! By all that was wonderful! He knew then that I had recognized him. His eyes were no longer haughty. They shone and were moist with pleasure.

Donald, my son, had gone to work. My wife was out. Only the *Chokra* (boy-servant) was on the premises.

Motioning with my hand to Mumpty to wait, I shouted to the *Chokra*, and when he came gave him instructions to go to the railway station nearly two miles away to inquire the time of the arrival of the mail train from Madras. That should keep him away for the next ninety minutes at least.

When the *Chokra* had gone, I called Mumpty inside, offered him tea and what odds and ends were to be found in the cupboard, and asked him how he fared.

'I did exactly as you instructed me, *dorai*. It broke my heart to throw my firearms and cartridges into the "Big Bannu" in the river. But I did so. The rest was comparatively easy. I reached the Mysore state border and the town of Kankanhalli in due course. There I got work as a labourer under a rich landlord. *Dorai*, how that man oppressed his

poor workers! How I longed to be Mumptyvayan again, if only for a few minutes, to deal with him suitably! His behaviour made me decide never to work for any other man again.

'But by this time I had noticed that there were many mendicants on the roads, most of them in some religious guise. None ever appeared to be hungry. Somehow, somebody fed them. So I decided to become a *sadhu*. My name is Omkrishna, and I am making quite a good living out of it. I'm touring the south and hope to make my way to the city of Madras, where I'll settle down eventually.'

'Not Madras, Mumpty—I mean, Omkrishna,' I corrected myself, 'Somebody in uniform might want you there. It's too close and you might be recognized. I suggest you go northwards instead, into Hyderabad state. The further you are from the scene of your operations the better, remember.'

He thought for a moment and then nodded. 'I think you're right, *dorai*.'

Then he rose to go. I offered him money, but the *sadhu* refused it. 'I'm indebted to you, sir,' he said, 'not you to me. Which reminds me, I've brought something for you. It's the only link I have with the old days.'

He rummaged in his *loincloth* and produced a ring—a gold ring!

'Where did you steal it?' I inquired sternly.

'I didn't steal it,' he replied. 'I got it from the engineer who went to Uttaimalai to build a dam.' Mumptyvayan was laughing now, as he thought of the incident. 'He was walking by the riverside with an armed policeman to keep guard over him. The stupid policeman had one of those toy guns disguised as rifles. They didn't know that I knew it.'

Omkrishna grinned more widely at the recollection. Then he continued: 'I called to the policeman from the shelter of a rock that I would shoot him dead if he tried to resist.'

'The poor devil was terrified. He threw down his ridiculous gun and bolted. I went to the engineer then, but made sure to throw the policeman's weapon into the river first. Strangely, the engineer *sahib* was not frightened. He was grinning at the policeman's hasty departure. In my usual rough voice, I demanded money from him. The engineer spoke strange words to me: "Don't threaten me, Mumptyvayan. Learn to ask nicely."

'He gave me ten rupees. He also took this ring off his finger and handed it to me. I tried to return the money and the ring, for the engineer *sahib* was indeed a good man and a brave one; a gentleman, too. But he refused to take them back. So I wore the ring myself for some time. I knew that if I tried to sell it, I might get caught. However, and this happened before I met you that night, *dorai,*'

Omkrishna hastened to add, as if in apology. 'After that meeting I have kept straight and have never robbed again, I can swear to that. And I kept the ring as a gift for you.'

So the unexpected had happened! My friend, the engineer, had longed to meet the dacoit Mumptyvayan. They had met, and as a result I now had his ring!

Omkrishna went away shortly after that and I never saw him again! A whole year passed, during which I often thought of Mumptyvayan but never heard of him. Several times I visited Hogenaikal and other areas that were his old haunts, but nobody spoke of him, nobody had seen him for a long time. Apparently he had disappeared for ever. Two months later the land was agog with the news! Mumptyvayan was dead! He had been shot by a friend who then claimed the reward that the government of Madras had placed on his head two years earlier. The reward was Rs 500, I think, and five acres of land, dead or alive!

Various stories were abroad about how his death had come about. Some said that Mumptyvayan had gone back to visit his wife, others that he had returned to visit a concubine who had been a great favourite. Wife or concubine—the woman had betrayed him! She had a brother, who was in debt and needed the reward badly. The story went that she had prepared Mumptyvayan's favourite dish for him, but into the food she had put *follidol*, a very powerful chemical supplied to the ryots by the government for killing insect pests that attack their crops. Mumptyvayan ate the food. In a few minutes he was in the throes of death. At that moment the woman's brother, who had been awaiting the propitious moment, came in and shot Mumptyvayan dead! For the reward stipulated that the dacoit should be brought in alive, or shot dead in self-defence, but it did not say anything about poisoning him.

The story has it that the reward was granted. Mumptyvayan's dead body was brought by the police to the town of Dharmapuri, where crowds gathered to witness his hasty burial.

My next story is about an animal and has nothing to do with magic or evil men. It is the story of a bull elephant, and an unusual one at that.

We met this elephant for the first time at about four-thirty one evening while motoring through the jungle, about two miles short of the forest lodge at Anaikutti and about ten miles beyond the old temple I told you about at the beginning of this chapter. He was grazing peacefully in the jungle some fifty yards to our right.

The car was filled with sightseers and amateur photographers, and they took innumerable pictures of the old elephant. He ignored us completely, both cars and people, behaving as if he were all alone, with no other creature within miles of him.

I was seated at the back of the car, on the right side, while a friend was driving. The other members were foreigners who had come to India to see the jungles. One of them, who had seen elephants before but only in zoos and circuses, stepped out from the car and, against our whispered advice, walked around the vehicle and half the distance towards the elephant. This was an extremely dangerous thing to have done and the rest of us called to him to return. So he stopped and took a picture. He took several more and then started asking for trouble by shouting at the elephant, waving his arms about, and finally by hurling stones at the animal. The first missed its mark by a narrow margin. The second struck a branch of the tree under which the bull was standing and bounced off, falling directly on his back. The third stone stuck the elephant in the face at the base of the trunk and rolled down, thudding against the left tusk before falling to the ground.

The bull did not retaliate. He merely turned his back on us, walked behind the tree, faced about and peered at us quietly as if to say, 'Can't you go away and leave me in peace?'

His behaviour was astounding. No other elephant would have acted thus, particularly no bull, after such provocation. The normal reaction would have been to make itself scarce at the first sight, or even the sound of the car. Allowing it had not done this, any wild elephant would certainly have been provoked by somebody repeatedly hurling stones at him. I confess I was certain it would charge, and the gentleman who had been so brave and foolish would soon cease to exist, together with the car and all of us in it. We could not have done anything to save ourselves, for it is against the rules to annoy wild elephants, to bait them, hurl stones at them, if they show resentment.

With difficulty we got our friend away from the place and continued on our drive in search of other animals to photograph.

It was 6 p.m. when we returned the same way, speculating on whether we would meet the elephant again. We had yet a furlong to go when we saw him once more, this time standing on the opposite side of the road, even closer to the track we were negotiating and facing us. We stopped again to watch, but he went on chewing placidly, every now and then stuffing his mouth with leaves from boughs he had broken down. We noticed that in the process he even ate the wood of the smaller branches on which the leaves were growing.

We studied the animal carefully. He appeared to be in good condition, not emaciated. There were no signs of a wound or of

sickness to account for his oddly placid behaviour. The only thing noticeable was that he was an old animal, as could be judged by the fact that the tops of his ears folded over, and by the hollows in his forehead.

Once more my new acquaintance got out of the car and started his stone-throwing. The elephant was closer to us now than at the first encounter, being barely twenty feet away and facing head-on. Something was bound to happen.

But the bull turned his back in obvious disgust and went on feeding. His behaviour was quite unaccountable. Even a domesticated elephant would not have tolerated such treatment from total strangers. To say the least, he would have moved away! Finally our acquaintance—brave, or mad, or both—called out to us that he was going to walk up to the bull. The rest of us then got out and seized him, practically dragging him back to the vehicle, while the elephant continued to graze placidly.

'Rats to your Indian elephants!' he exclaimed in disdain. 'They're as harmless as rabbits.'

At dinner that night the subject was the same. Questions were fired at me that I could not possibly answer. Was this how fiercely wild elephants actually behaved? I was worried. Why had the bull acted in such a strangely docile manner? I fell asleep determined to solve the puzzle the following day.

After breakfast the next morning, I enlisted the aid of two Karumba trackers and taking my rifle we motored to the place where we had met the elephant the evening before. We left the car there and followed his progress through the jungle. This was an easy task for the Karumbas and we came upon him again, a little over half-a-mile away, headed in the general direction of the Anaikutti river, which was still about a mile and a half distant. He was not grazing now, but standing placidly under a tree.

The Karumbas, of course, acted with great caution; but emboldened by our experience of the evening before, I walked towards the bull, the jungle men following at a considerable distance and ready to take off at the first sign of trouble. Nothing happened, although I came as close to the elephant as had my friend the evening before. The bull took no notice of me whatever.

I walked around him. I was convinced he was sorely injured. Or perhaps he was a very sick animal. Then the idea came to me: maybe he was blind in one or both eyes. Or he was deaf. Or he could not smell. There was something seriously wrong with him; of that I was convinced.

For a second time I circled him. At that moment I noticed him following my movements with his small eyes. But they were not

inflamed, and there was certainly no sign of the discharge that would show on a bull in '*musth*.' And the animal was not blind. He then lifted his trunk a little towards me and then I knew he could even smell.

What could be wrong with him? Lazily he lifted his trunk, broke a twig above him and stuffed it into his mouth. He could not be wounded or sick, for then he would not be eating so well. All that I was able to discover was that he was a very old animal indeed. Apart from the hollows in his forehead and temples, and the turned-down skin at the tops of his ears, the ivory of both tusks was blackened at the roots with age.

The two Karumbas had been standing at a safe distance while I had been circling the bull. One of them now called out to me, 'there's no mystery here, *dorai*. The Wise one (the manner in which the Karumbas usually refer to elephants) is very old. His days on earth are over, and he has come to the river to die in it peacefully.'

We left it at that and returned to camp. The following day I had some business at the town of Gudalur, nineteen miles away, which is the headquarters of the district. A string of carts, laden with lengths of sugar cane, passed me on the main street. I thought of the old elephant then and of an experiment I would like to try with him. So I bought a dozen pieces, each over six feet in length.

Next morning I went to Anaikutti again, this time with three Karumbas. Two of them carrying the sugarcane. We trailed the old tusker from the spot at which we had seen last and found him on the bank of Anaikutti river. He was standing in the shade of a *muthee* tree.

I approached cautiously with one of the Karumbas who was carrying six of the sugar-cane stems. I can assure you he came with the greatest reluctance. The bull saw us and half-turned slowly. Now he was facing us. The Karumba stopped. I took two lengths of the sugar cane in my left hand, holding my loaded rifle cocked in the crook of my right arm, and advanced slowly and deliberately towards the animal, staring into its eyes but with only conciliatory thoughts in my mind. The next few seconds would show whether this strange animal's behaviour would culminate in a sort of friendship or in enmity.

When I got to within a few feet, the bull became very nervous. He blew air through his trunk and began curling it inwards to protect it from possible harm. His ears flapped. They came forwards and then went backwards against the side of his head. Bad signs indeed! He was about to charge!

I halted, extending my arm to hold out the sugar cane towards him. I did not speak, for I know the human voice annoys and frightens animals.

The elephant became less restive and my arms began to ache with

the weight of the sugar cane. After some minutes, I inched forward again, continuing till the broad leaves at the end of the six-foot piece of cane were within reach of his trunk. Then I stopped, holding it out invitingly. With a nervous swish of his trunk the elephant tore the cane from my grasp, pulled it towards himself, and then beat it repeatedly against the ground. He hesitated. I knew he was pondering the question as to what to do next. Put it into his mouth? Stamp upon it and crush it with his weight? Throw it away? Or perhaps attack the puny intruder?

Cautiously, the bull placed the cane sideways in his mouth and bit it. That did it! He tasted the sweet juice, perhaps for the first time in his life, for there were no sugar cane fields in this area. Or maybe he hailed from far-off parts and had eaten sugar cane before and remembered the taste. Anyway, he obviously liked it. For he munched at the cane, while his small eyes stared at me unwinkingly. There was no enmity in them, but there was nervousness still.

I handed him the second length of cane after he had finished the first. He took it readily enough and munched it.

The Karumbas, with the rest of the sugar cane had stopped some distance away and refused to approach any nearer. I knew they regarded my actions as sheer madness. As I was reluctant to dispense with my rifle, I had to make two more trips from the elephant to the Karumbas and back again before I had fed him the remaining ten pieces of cane. But at last they were done and the strangest friendship that ever was heard of had been established between the old wild bull and myself.

The next day I motored to Gundlupet, twenty-one miles away, where sugar-cane could be had, and bought a whole load of the stuff. On the return journey I passed my old friend, Mr Chandran, one of the Forest Range Officers attached to the Mudumalai Game Sanctuary that came very close to the area where the old bull was living out the last days of his existence. I told him the story and he was amazed, adding that he had never heard of anything like it in all his service with the forest department. Mr Chandran reminded me of an incident about two years earlier, when he and I had been in a government jeep, conducting a German friend through the sanctuary.

On that occasion, the jeep had been travelling downhill along a narrow track when we had turned a corner and almost run into a wild tusker feasting on a clump of bamboos he had knocked down, which lay across the road. The tusker saw us and came straight at the jeep. I forgot to tell you that none of us carried firearms, as the area was a game sanctuary and no rifles or guns were allowed. Fortunately the driver kept his head and did not capsize the vehicle by running down the steep slope to our right. The hill banked upwards on the left, so

we could not escape that way.

The bull reached the radiator, halted, smacked the bonnet with his trunk and—did nothing more! The driver came to life then and backed the jeep as far as he possibly could. Meanwhile, the tusker had gone. After ten minutes we advanced once more towards the bamboo-clump that lay across the track and got out to cut a clearing for the jeep when back upon us in great rage came the bull!

We scurried into the vehicle while the elephant mounted guard over his precious bamboo. This time we had to reverse the jeep for about a furlong before the track was wide enough to turn it around. Needless to say, we left the tusker with the bamboo as his prize!

Mr Chandran related another incident that had occurred more recently. He was again accompanying a party of tourists in the same jeep and with the same driver. A baby elephant suddenly ran across the track, frightened by the sound of the jeep, and its mother came after it. Fury seized her when she saw this strange thing, which she took to be an enemy, so close to her calf. Without further ado she overturned the jeep and then herded her calf to safety. Fortunately, the presence of the calf and her anxiety to get it out of harm's way had distracted her and prevented her from killing the jeep's occupants. As it was, the vehicle was damaged and several of the inmates injured, although not by the elephant directly.

The docile behaviour of the old bull at Anaikutti was all the more amazing in the light of these occurrences.

I returned the next day to feed him again. He accepted the cane readily enough, but did not seem very hungry, as he took only two pieces. The third and fourth pieces I offered him he refused, merely touching them with the tip of his trunk.

The following day we were back once more, but this time the old bull would accept nothing. He just stood in front of me, acknowledging my offering with the tip of his trunk, but taking nothing. His eyes were watery and seemed to hold a sad expression. When I left him, he even turned his head as if to bid an old friend farewell.

For some reason I could not visit him as usual the next day, but at about nine o'clock on the morning of the fourth day, I went to see him again, along with the Karumbas and the sugar cane. But he was not there. However, we knew well enough where we would find him. He would be at the 'Big Pool', half a mile upstream, the 'place where the elephants come to die,' as the Karumbas call it in their own language.

And we found him there, right enough. He was dead. The weather had been dry and the pool was only four feet deep. But the tusker had deliberately lain down in it on his side and placed his head and trunk beneath the surface of the water to drown. His flank protruded above

and that was how we found him.

There lies the answer to the great secret: where do the elephants go, and how do they die, when they become too old to live? They drown themselves in a river. I had solved the mystery and at the same time had enjoyed a unique friendship with a full-grown wild tusker, although it was but a brief one.

Four

The Dumb Man-Eater of Talavadi

I HAVE MET MANY UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS IN MY TIME AND most of them have been jungle men; Indian, Anglo-Indian and European. For the forest appears to develop a man's personality. The more time he spends there the clearer his personality becomes. One such character was my friend Hughie Hailstone, who lived in a wonderful home he had built for himself called 'Moyar Valley Ranch,' down at a place named Mudiyanoor, near Talaimalai, in a corner of the North Coimbatore district and not very far away from the Moyar river, which separates North Coimbatore from the Nilgiri forest division.

Now Hughie was a character if ever there was one. He attended the same school as I did, but passed out much earlier. From that time he followed a varied career. But the man had brains. Everything he touched turned to gold. With some of this money he bought a large tract of forest land and on it he built his Moyar Valley Ranch.

Hughie had a fine collection of firearms, the best that money could buy, but among these he had a great fancy for a .023 Mauser rifle with a hexagonal barrel with which, if I remember rightly, he told me he had shot nine elephants and over twenty tigers. Later, Hughie took a great liking to my son Donald and presented him with this very weapon. Donald was, of course, delighted. But what enhanced the value of the gift was the fact that it was Hughie's favourite weapon. Frankly, I do not believe I could ever part with my ancient, but lovable, old .405. It has been my companion and solace for over forty

years.

My story begins at a point where in some part of India Hughie either found or heard of a special kind of grass, the stems of which when dry were stronger than the ordinary matchstick, and not so brittle. They would not break easily, and they burned readily. So Hughie conceived the idea of cultivating this grass on a large scale on the lands of his Moyar Valley Ranch with a view to starting a match factory that would turn out a product to be sold at about half the price of those already on the market, and of much higher quality.

He obtained seeds in quantity, ploughed his lands with the first shower of the monsoon rains, and sowed them. Up came the grass in fine style. Acres of it. The land was virgin and the grass grew to five feet and more. I remember watching it as it bent and rippled to the breeze. But before Hughie's grass could be turned into match sticks there came herds of deer, particularly chital, and large sounders of wild pigs. The deer, of course, ate the grass, while the wild pigs made it their home and did considerable damage by digging it up at places, though for the most part they burrowed a maze of low tunnels through it, leading here, there and everywhere. In these tunnels they sheltered and multiplied to the extent that Hughie wondered eventually whether he should persevere with the match factory or run a ham and bacon concern!

Best of all, with deer and the pigs came tigers and panthers to eat them. Rather I should say more tigers than panthers, for the former arrived in such numbers as not only to decimate the deer and pig population, but to kill and eat the panthers too, so that in the course of time the smaller cats learned to give the match-grass a very wide berth.

Now Hughie employed an assistant, a man named Sweza (a corruption of D'Souza), who came from Mangalore on the west coast of India. Sweza was a most versatile individual: he did everything for Hughie, whose problems he not only knew but anticipated.

He once said to me with reference to his employer, 'I don't know why master spend much money to make more money. Master got plenty money to enjoy and enjoy. But no; he want to make matchsticks, tooth powder from *babul* bark, fertilizer from jungle seeds mixed with elephants' dung, invention for finding underground water, digging ground for getting some stones master says got iron, all sort of things. Only spending money. Why for? This very good place. Master should enjoy. Plenty girls got it here. Young girls; not 'nuff husbands here. I tell-it master. He get very angry. He say-it, "Sweza, you bloody rogue you got it one wife and three more women already. I saved you from one more wife. Now you want to put me in the same trouble!"'

But he was a good fellow, this Sweza, game for anything and as

keen as mustard. And he ate well! His paunch and his jolly smile showed this.

One Easter, Sweza felt that his master and himself were entitled to roast pork or venison. So he borrowed his master's small-bore rifle after confiding his good intentions to Hughie, and waded into the match-grass, now somewhat withered and thinned down by the summer heat, in search of quarry. Sweza had not gone very far when he saw the snout of a medium-sized wild pig regarding him with grave suspicion from between the stems of the grass. He fired. The pig fell, picked itself up again, and disappeared. Sweza started to follow hard on its trail.

Just then there was a great swishing in the grass where the pig had disappeared, a snarl, and the scream of a dying animal. Sweza beat a hasty retreat and told his master.

Hughie came out with one of his heavy rifles and Sweza led him to the place where he had fired at the pig, pointing out the direction in which it had gone. Hughie went on and Sweza made to follow him from behind, but Hughie very wisely objected to this. He did not want a bullet from Sweza's rifle in his back. So he asked his servant to go back and wait for him in the open.

Hughie came to the spot where the pig had been killed, but there was no trace of its body. The killer had carried it away. Bent and broken stems of dried grass showed the direction he had taken with his burden. Moving cautiously forward, he had gone for quite a hundred yards when suddenly a loud growl from in front told him the killer was feeding somewhere ahead and resented his intrusion. But Hailstone had seen and shot many tigers and was not to be intimidated by a growl. He moved forward stealthily and the tiger growled more loudly. Hughie knew the charge would come at any moment.

A little later the tiger charged. It came in great leaping bounds through the dried match-grass. Hailstone waited till he could see the contorted face clearly, till the final spring would land the beast right on top of him. Then he fired. Thus was born the man-eater of Talavadi! Hughie's bullet struck the tiger full in the face. The impact tended to stop it, but the weight of the body behind still pushed it forward, with the result that the tiger somersaulted just a few yards away. Hughie worked the bolt of his rifle rapidly to get in a second shot. The magazine jammed.

He did the right thing after that. He turned and fled.

Evidently the tiger was temporarily blinded or maybe too hurt to follow. It floundered about in the grass, digging great holes in the earth as, in agony, it bit and tore the ground with its claws and teeth.

Hughie dashed into the bungalow to get another rifle, Sweza

running after him and asking what had happened. But by the time Hailstone got to the spot again, advancing one step at a time, the tiger had vanished, while splashes of blood and saliva on the ground made it plain he had received a severe wound in the region of the mouth or throat.

It is a common belief among some hunters that a wounded feline should not be followed up immediately. Sufficient time should be allowed to pass in which the animal might possibly bleed to death. At least, the wounds would stiffen to the extent that the beast would be disinclined to move far, or it might even be incapable of movement. But there is another school of thought which advocates following up at once. The theory in this case is that the wounded animal should not be given time to recover from the shock and pain of its wounds and from its immediate fear. The advocates of this theory feel that, with the passage of time and long hours of pain, the wounded beast becomes vicious and bent upon revenge, whereas immediately after being wounded it seeks only to escape. They also argue that on humanitarian grounds it is very cruel to allow an animal to suffer hours of intense agony with a vital organ shot away.

Now I am not going to give my own judgment on these theories, except to say that both are partly right and partly wrong. Each animal has its individual characteristics and special nature and will react in its own way. Hughie was a firm believer in the second theory and lost no time in following up.

The blood trail through the long match-grass was clear. It left Hughie's land and entered the forest, where things became a little more difficult. Hughie had to rely on his own abilities as Sweza, still trailing behind with the other rifle, was no tracker. They followed it across a dry ravine, where the tiger had lain down and then continued, and across flat country the other side. The fact that the tiger had lain down indicated that it was badly wounded, and as Hughie had followed up at once, the animal could not be very far away. Probably it had heard him and Sweza and was taking cover in the undergrowth. The third item of information was that this animal appeared to be a coward; it should have taken advantage of the terrain and plenty of cover in the ravine to ambush the two men.

By now the bleeding had lessened and after crossing the flat stretch for another furlong the trail began to lead downhill, where the ground became increasingly stony. Hughie had to slow down and keep looking about for the next drop or two of blood. Soon even this ceased and he could go no further. On that hard ground no pug-marks were visible.

For some unaccountable reason the tracts of forest in the Mudiyanoor area are entirely devoid of jungle tribes or aboriginal

population. It is believed this has been so since the days when Tippoo Sultan, the Muslim ruler of Mysore, invaded the surrounding country, sweeping all before him. So Hughie had no opportunity to return later and follow the tiger, as there was nobody in all that area who knew anything about tracking.

The village of Talaimalai is about two miles south of Mudiyanoor, where Hughie had his farm. It is a small hamlet surrounded by fertile country. Nearly two months later, one of the villagers from this place bought a tract of land from his neighbour, or rather arranged to buy it, for the sale deed pertaining to this transaction had necessarily to be signed and registered in the office of the sub-registrar and the money paid by the purchaser to the seller in the presence of this august individual whose headquarters were at a larger village named Talavadi, situated seven miles north of Mudiyanoor. So the vendor and the prospective purchaser, the latter carrying the money he was going to pay for the land, which came to Rs 400, including the incidental expenses involved in the sale deed, set forth together on foot to cover the nine miles between Talaimalai and Talavadi.

They had covered two-thirds of this distance when they crossed a stream that had a little water in it. Here they stopped under a large tree to eat the curried balls of *ragi* flour they had brought with them as a midday meal. The purchaser then went down to the stream to drink and wash while his companion watched him with sleepy eyes.

Suddenly something huge leaped down upon the drinking man from the opposite bank of the stream and back again across the stream to disappear as abruptly as it had come, except that there was no longer any sign of the unfortunate purchaser. He had disappeared, along with that horrible apparition!

The vendor, now fully awake, leaped to his feet and ran as fast as he could towards Talavadi, covering the three miles to that place in record time. There he gasped out his story before the sub-registrar and the clerks sitting in the office. All this being something out of the ordinary, the sub-registrar sent the man to the police station, where the whole tale was repeated.

In the opinion of the constable in charge there was nothing strange about the story. As he reasoned it out, here we have A reporting that he is selling some land to B for Rs 400. A and B set out to register the sale, B carrying Rs 400. On the way, A says that some strange creature appeared out of the jungle and disappeared again, taking B with it. A reports he was more than half-asleep and cannot describe what this strange something was. But the facts remain that B has vanished, the Rs 400 have vanished with him, and the land still belongs to A.

Without further ado, the head constable arrested the unfortunate vendor and locked him in the police station's solitary cell. Then he

wrote a lengthy report, stating why he suspected he had caught a murderer. He did not forget to add that the sub-inspector at Satyamangalam, which was the headquarters of the Police and Forest departments and the place to which the prisoner would have to be sent, might please bear in mind when he read the report that it was the humble prayer of the head constable that promotion was long overdue and this brave and dramatic arrest of a dangerous murderer and thief should forthwith clinch matters and lead to the said promotion without delay. He closed the report by saying that he offered daily prayers for the sub-inspector's continued long life and prosperity.

It was not till a week later that the fourth constable attached to the police station at Talavadi returned from leave. The head constable then felt he could manage with two policemen while he sent the other two on escort duty with the prisoner, and his report, to Satyamangalam, where the sub-inspector resided, forty miles away. They should reach there in three days, for they had to walk the whole distance.

Hailstone happened to be standing at the entrance to the grounds of his farm, which abutted on the track leading from Talavadi to Satyamangalam, when he saw the two policemen coming along with a prisoner handcuffed between them. Conversationally he inquired what wrong the man had done and where he was being taken. The constables, glad of the respite, said they were escorting a murderer, while the poor vendor burst into tears, sobbing out his innocence and his story afresh.

Hughie pricked up his ears.

'Stop weeping, you idiot,' he said kindly but firmly. 'If you want me to help you, just answer a simple question. What was this strange something that you say carried away your companion? At least, what did it look like?'

'*Dorai,*' the man replied, striving to control himself, 'I saw my friend stoop to drink water. At that instant I must have fallen asleep. I heard nothing, but seemed to see some huge, long body jump down from the jungle across the stream and jump back again. Then only did I notice the man had gone! I woke up and ran all the way to Talavadi. Now these policemen say I have murdered my friend and taken his money.'

Then he started crying once more at the thought of his plight.

Hughie remembered the tiger he had wounded just two months earlier. He had often thought about it and wondered if the animal had died or had recovered from its wound. And if it had recovered, Hughie knew that sooner or later he would hear about the animal again. Could this be it?

'Did it look like a tiger?' he asked abruptly.

The policemen looked at him stupidly, but the man in handcuffs replied quickly, 'Come to think of it, *dorai*, it might have been a tiger. As I said, I was more than half asleep and the whole thing happened so quickly. But it was nothing in human form that carried away my companion, of that I am certain. It was something long and big.'

'Don't take this poor man to Satyamangalam,' Hughie advised the policemen. 'Save yourself the journey, for he is no murderer. I think I know what really happened.'

But the officers of law and order the world over are dogged in their purposes, especially when they have someone in handcuffs. The policemen continued on their way to Satyamangalam with their captive, while Hughie went in his car to Talavadi. To his mortification, he discovered from the head constable that nobody knew exactly where the incident had taken place except the prisoner himself, as nobody had taken the trouble to investigate the story or make an inspection of the spot.

Hailstone considered telling the head constable about the wounded tiger but decided against it. A man of his temperament, with a one-track mind, might do anything. He might even lock Hailstone up! So he left the police station without further ado and set out for Satyamangalam, overtaking the two policemen and their prisoner some ten miles beyond Mudiyanoor. Glad of the lift, the three men piled into the car and in less than ninety minutes the whole party were with the sub-inspector.

The sub-inspector read the head constable's report and then listened to what Hughie had to say.

'And this man wants a promotion' was his comment after Hughie had told him that the head constable had not even troubled to visit the scene of the tragedy. 'I shall see him reverted! Please take me to Talavadi in your car.'

Back they went, all five of them, to give the head constable at Talavadi the nastiest surprise of his life. Then the vendor took them to the place where the would-be purchaser and his money had vanished. The head constable was made to go too.

Over a week had passed, but when they crawled to the top of the bank they found the pug-marks of a tiger at the spot where it had clambered back with its burden, the unlucky would-be purchaser. Casting around, a little distance away but still to be seen in the sand, were the fainter imprints of the tiger before it had launched its attack.

Hughie had not brought his rifle. The sub-inspector inquired nervously if the tiger might still be there. Hailstone said 'no,' and the six men started searching the immediate surrounding for the remains of the victim. Strangely enough, it was the vendor, now no longer in

chains, who stumbled upon the gnawed bones. A few rags and the ten-rupee notes that had been scattered by the breeze in a wide circle in the grass and undergrowth, confirmed that the remains were indeed all that was left of the purchaser. There were only a few, as most of the bones had been removed by the vultures, jackals and hyaenas that had visited the carcase after the tiger had finished.

The man-eater struck a second time scarcely a month later. This was at the village of Nagalur, about halfway between Hughie's place and the Moyar river which bounded the Nilgiri district. The third victim was an old man who was walking behind his two sons on the old Sultan's Battery Road, a couple of miles behind Talaimalai village. This killing took place in broad daylight—at noon, as a matter of fact.

The three men had set out together from Talaimalai to Nagalur, where the second victim had been taken. For some distance their way lay along the old road I have named, a relic of the days of that fierce Muslim conqueror who long ago brought terror to this region. They had not gone far when they came to a mighty wild-mango tree. Monkeys had knocked down some of the ripe fruit and the three men stopped to eat. When they started walking again the father had fallen behind, from where he continued to talk to them about the business that was taking them to Nagalur.

He had reminded them that it was getting late and they had all begun to walk faster, when a sudden choking cry made the two sons turn around to see a huge tiger with its jaws firmly in their father's throat, in the act of springing into the undergrowth that closely bordered the road on both sides.

Where the beast had come from they never knew. It had certainly made no sound whatever, not even a growl or snarl, which was rather unusual, for attacking tigers generally roar or make some sort of noise to inflate their own courage before springing. In this case, all they had heard was their father's last gasp. By this time the attacker had disappeared and the two boys took to their heels, running as fast as they could back to Talaimalai.

Consternation spread among the village folk and the man-eater, as if he knew very well that his name had struck terror in the area, increased the number of his attacks as he began to roam over a wider circle. He killed as far north as the high road connecting Satyamangalam with the large town of Chamrajnagar in Mysore state. He killed to the east as far as Dimbum, a hamlet standing on the escarpment of mountains overlooking the Satyamangalam plain. He crossed the Moyar river and went into the Nilgiri district to the south, and on the west he trespassed into the Bandipur area which lies in Mysore state.

Unfortunately, at just about this time Hughie, who had always

been a vigorous man, fell ill. It happened suddenly and unexpectedly. I know he felt deeply about all that had taken place and was happening, for he held himself responsible for starting the tiger on its man-eating career by wounding it, and he chafed at the illness that prevented him from going after it, which he would otherwise have assuredly done. So he wrote to me, and that was what took me in my Studebaker to Moyar Valley Ranch.

Sweza met me at the gate and I found Hughie asleep in a canvas chair on his verandah. He had not heard my car. The change in his appearance since we had last me was almost frightening. A robust man, he had shrunk to half his normal size and looked haggard and very ill. He apologized for dragging me away from home and then, as I sat beside him drinking tea and eating the most delicious mangoes that grew on his land, Hughie told the story as I have told it here, not sparing himself and full of self-recrimination not only for wounding the tiger but for not finishing it off after that.

These things happen, Hughie,' was all the comfort I could offer. 'You must pull yourself together now and join me in killing it.'

He looked at me wryly and said, 'Kenneth, my hunting days are over. My next *shikar* will be in the happy hunting grounds—if there's such a place!'

Indeed, he never hunted again. Shortly after the end of this episode he went by air to England. He had already bought a house there, a nice place in the country. But he was not to enjoy it, for he had been there only a few days when he slipped and fell down the staircase, injuring himself severely. Soon afterwards he died of a heart attack.

However, we now discussed what should be done. It was clear that it would not be worth my while to visit Nagalur and Talaimalai and other places where the tiger had killed, in order to question the people about the animal's habits and peculiarities. Hughie had already done this before falling ill and told me all he had discovered. To begin with, there was scarcely any doubt that it was the animal he had wounded that had now become a man-eater. The few people who had seen it clearly, particularly the two sons of the old man who had been snatched on the Sultan's Battery Road, affirmed that the glimpse they had got of the tiger's face showed there was something seriously the matter with it. The face had been hideously scarred and contorted. Secondly, the animal's uncanny silence on every occasion when there had been a witness to its attack proved that it was either a very strange animal by nature, or that something was wrong with its vocal chords. Moreover, nobody remembered having ever heard this tiger roar.

Of course, tigers had often roared in the area. This was to be

expected, because it was full of tigers. But in no locality where any of the human kills had taken place, or at least not for a few days before or after that killing, had any tiger roared in the forest. For this reason the rumour spread that the man-eater was dumb.

The procedure normally followed in trying to shoot a man-eater is as unexciting as it appears to be self-contradictory. The hunter purchases three or four live baits in the form of buffalo heifers or young bulls and ties them out at pre-selected places where *machans* have already been put up, in the hope that the tiger may kill one of them. The hunter then sits in the *machan* the following night to shoot the tiger when it returns for a second meal.

Having heard that man-eaters eat men, you may wonder why an animal bait is tied out. Would a man-eater want to kill it? The answer is that man-eaters do not confine themselves to a diet of human flesh. They merely prefer the flesh of men to other meat. Perhaps a man is easier to find. He is certainly easier to stalk and kill. Maybe there is something appetizing about human flesh. But anyway, one cannot very well tie out a human being as bait.

With Hughie's influence and Sweza's help I purchased four young bulls at Talaimalai village. The two boys whose father had been killed volunteered to help me in tethering the animals and building *machans*, so I recruited them and two more to assist. With Hughie and Sweza we formed a committee of seven persons when we sat down to deliberate on where to tie our baits. Strangely, it has become customary to tether a bait as near as possible to the spot where a kill has already taken place. I do not really know why this is so. It is certainly wrong reasoning to infer that a man-eater, like a murderer, may have a guilty conscience and come back to the scene of his crime. To a man-eater his action is no crime. It is merely his dinner.

I admit I have fallen into the habit myself, but now I come to think of it, the practice follows faulty reasoning. As a matter of fact, a man-eater is more likely to avoid the scene of one of his former kills rather than go there again, because he knows of the publicity it occasioned and the number of people who have visited the spot since the occurrence.

The real thing to do, as I have related in earlier stories, is to try to work out the line of beat the killer has been following by studying a map of the locality and marking on it the places where each human kill occurred and the date of each event. When the tiger is a man-eater of long standing, with many crimes to his discredit, such a study reveals that he has been following a fixed route over and over again, returning to the same localities (but not the exact spot) in which he has killed before, once in so many weeks or months as the case may be. In *shikar* parlance, this habit or practice is known as the 'man-

eater's beat.'

I suppose in a way this answers the question posed earlier as to why it has become more or less an accepted practice to tie a bait near the spot where a human kill has already occurred. One hopes it will be on the tiger's beat and that he will come again. But this may not happen for many weeks or even months, for every man-eater does not follow a beat. Most do, but there are exceptions. And in any case such a beat can only be worked out with a man-eater of long standing. The animal I was after had started recently and his killings so far had been haphazard.

All of which brings me back to the fact that it was difficult for us to decide precisely where to tie out and there was much difference of opinion. The two boys advocated trying the Sultan's Battery Road where their father had been killed. The other two men I had recruited to help me said the track leading from Talaimalai to Talavadi would be best, as tiger pug-marks were seen along it nearly every day. Hughie suggested tying the four baits a mile apart from each other and in a straight line, two to three miles south of Talaimalai, where the ground fell away abruptly to the valley of the Moyar river. Sweza suggested tying up somewhere in Hughie's match-grass, where the tiger was first wounded, because he felt it would return there to eat the spotted deer and wild pig that were still abundant.

Of all these suggestions, I decided the last was the least likely to bring success. The man-eater would never return to a place where it had been so badly hurt. So we ruled it out. All the other suggestions were equally good and it appeared to be a matter of luck where and when the tiger would next show up.

Eventually we decided to tether one of the baits on the Sultan's Battery Road, another on the Talaimalai-Talavadi track, and the third and fourth baits at two of the most likely spots along the ridge south of Talaimalai that overlooked the Moyar river, as suggested by Hughie. I felt that the kill, if and when it took place, would be one of these two baits, as tigers passed to and from the Nilgiri forests to the Talaimalai Reserve across this ridge. However, as there was more than one tiger in the area, we would not know whether the man-eater or some quite innocent tiger had made the kill, and the only course open would be to shoot it in the hope that it turned out to be the man-eater. The selection of the exact spot for each tie-up was to be left to me.

I told my four helpers to return at dawn the next day with another eight men, so that there would be a dozen of them altogether, allowing sufficient men for the task of erecting each of the four *machans* that were to be put up before the baits were tied out.

I have found it wise to erect the *machan* first and only afterwards to tie the bait in a suitable line of fire. Then, when a kill occurs, the

hunter is ready to take his place. The other way around much disturbance is caused in tying a *machan* after the bait has been killed, and should the tiger be lying in concealment within hearing he generally fails to return.

The *machan* I favoured using at that time, and still think is best, is an ordinary *charpoy* cot with its four legs cut short. For those of you who don't know what a *charpoy* cot is, I may explain that it consists of a rectangular wooden or bamboo frame of four pieces, about six feet by three. Rope, or wide cotton tape, is laced across this frame, while four legs at each of the four corners complete the cot. Most villagers sleep on the ground, but in certain places unduly infested with snakes and scorpions, *charpoy* cots are the only type that are favoured, for they are made in the villages and cost in the region of five rupees each, including the rope used. Where cotton tape or webbing is employed for more comfort—the price, at the most, is doubled.

My *machan* consisted of a cot of the latter type. Each of the four legs had been shortened to a foot in length, sufficient to provide something by which to tie the cot to the branches of a tree. The cot itself was cut into two and folded on two hinges for convenience of transport. Its advantages are obvious; it provided maximum comfort with minimum weight and noise should I be forced to move about, which, incidentally, is the one thing you should never do in sitting up!

Hughie favoured another type of machan, which was nothing more than a folding canvas chair with a footrest to keep your legs from dangling downwards. Sitting in one of these always gave me a sense of insecurity—a feeling that I would either fall out of it, or that the whole structure would collapse at any moment. Of course, this was only prejudice, as in reality there was no real risk either way and I was grateful when Hughie offered to lend me his canvas chair-*machan* to be used in one of the four places we had selected. This meant that the remaining two *machans* would have to be constructed on the spot with bamboos and wood cut in the jungle.

Work began in earnest next day, when the dozen men arrived carrying their sharp knives. Hughie supplied all the rope we would need, so with four of the men leading the bulls I had purchased to serve as bait, we were soon on the Talaimalai-Talavadi road, where we were to tie the first *machan*.

We had gone scarcely a quarter of a mile along this track when we saw, clearly imprinted on the soft earth, the fresh pug-marks of a tiger that had come down the bed of a small *nullah* that crossed the road. The tiger had passed in the early hours of the morning, which was revealed by the fact that the powdery dust bordering the edges of the track had not yet fallen into the depressions made by the tiger's pads. With the passage of a few hours and the action of the wind, this would

certainly have happened were the tracks more than six hours old.

Walking up the *nullah*, both to the left and right of where it crossed the road, we saw several older tracks, indicating that this dry streambed was much used either by the tiger whose tracks we had just seen or by other tigers in the locality. Unfortunately, due to their age, these tracks could not be identified for certain with the fresh ones along the road which undoubtedly had been made by an adult male of rather bigger than average size.

A banyan tree grew on the farther bank of the *nullah* just before it crossed the road, and all agreed that this would be the ideal place for the first *machan*. It was an old tree, and many of the roots that had dropped to the earth from the higher branches had in the course of the years, themselves taken root and grown into the thickness of minor tree-trunks. Within this network of the roots and trunks it would be easy for us to put up an inconspicuous machan, and I decided to save my *charpoy* and Hughie's chair for one of the other places where natural construction might not be so easy. We completed that *machan* in ninety minutes, and after tying the first bait in a convenient position, set out for our second selection, which you will remember was the Sultan's Battery Road.

The sons of the old man who had been killed showed me where the tragedy had taken place, and within a couple of furlongs of this spot and once again where a *nullah* crossed the road, we erected the second *machan*. This again was constructed on the spot, but took much longer to do, so that it was nearly noon before we set out for the ridge, two miles away, overlooking the Moyar Valley and Niligri jungles whence the tigers generally came.

My guides, who had lived in the area all their lives, pointed out first one then a second game trail that led up from the valley to the south of us, down which in the distance flowed the Moyar river, its course easily recognizable by the thick belt of giant trees on its bank. From the height at which we were standing, the Moyar looked like a great green python, writhing its course through the forest.

On convenient trees we tied our remaining *machans*, my *charpoy* first and finally Hughie's canvas chair, while with the tying-up of our fourth unfortunate bull-bait, the work of the day came to an end. The sun was sinking across the jungles of Bandipur to the west when we started on our walk back to Hughie's farm quite five miles away. It had been a long day and we were very tired, but I was very satisfied by the four jobs we had completed. All I had now to do was scour the jungle in other directions by day in the hope of meeting the man-eater accidentally. Meanwhile, I would sleep peacefully at Hughie's place by night till one of my baits was taken.

Little did I know what was going to happen.

The two sons of the old man and the first two men who had volunteered to help me had been instructed to visit the four baits next morning, and every morning thereafter, and to feed and water them, till a kill occurred. They were to begin with the most distant baits, the two animals we had tied on the western ridge, and then work eastwards to the Sultan's Battery Road, and finally to the first bait on the Talaimalai-Talavadi track, which was the closest of the four to Hughie's farm.

It was ten-thirty next morning when I heard them coming up the driveway, talking excitedly, and I knew that a kill had occurred. But the news they brought was surprising—and disconcerting! The last bait we had tied the previous evening—the one under Hughie's canvas-chair *machan*—had been killed and part eaten, and the first animal at the junction of the *nullah* with the Talaimalai-Talavadi road had also been killed and about half devoured.

Two kills on the same night, at points at least five miles apart. This clearly pointed to two tigers. Now which of them was the man-eater and in which of the *machans* should I sit?

Another consultation was held, but this time we were unanimous. The tiger that had killed the first bait—the nearest to the farm—was far more likely to be the man-eater, for its tracks had indicated that it haunted the *nullah*-bed crossing the Talaimalai-Talavadi road on which a human kill had already taken place and which was frequented by human beings. The other kill on the ridge was at a far less frequented spot, where people hardly ever went, but which was used by tigers coming from the Nilgiri district, or returning to it. As such, the tiger that had killed there was in all likelihood not the man-eater. It was therefore decided that I should sit at the *nullah*-crossing that night.

With this settled, the next thing to do was to put in a few hours of sleep.

Hughie called me at one o'clock for a hearty lunch and gave me a parcel of sandwiches for the night, a most acceptable gift. By two-thirty I was on the *machan*, looking down upon the half-eaten young bull as my four assistants removed the branches with which they had covered the carcase that morning to protect it from vultures.

There was silence after their departure and, as was to be expected, no travellers passed along the road, the presence of the man-eater discouraging people, especially towards evening, from using a track on which he had already killed a man. I was surprised, therefore, to hear voices approaching from the Talaimalai village direction some time after five o'clock, and astonished when I recognized the party as my own four attendants, accompanied by Sweza carrying a gun. They came to tell me that the man-eater had killed a woman while she was

carrying water from a well near the hamlet of Dimbum, which was seventeen miles away on the Satyamangalam-Chamrajnagar road. Hughie had sent them with the news, as he felt that I might not consider it worthwhile to sit up all night to shoot a tiger which obviously could not be the man-eater. No tiger that had devoured half a bull the previous night would walk a distance of seventeen miles to kill a woman the next morning.

I heartily agreed with the message Hughie had sent and came down from the *machan*. As far as I was concerned the tiger that haunted the *nullah* was welcome to the remaining half of his meal. When I got back, Hughie suggested that I go at once to Dimbum and try to find a place to sit up, either near the well or wherever the woman had been killed. No doubt her family would have removed her remains for cremation, but it was just possible that the man-eater might return to the spot during the night in search of the body of his victim. I agreed and started straight away, taking my four helpers along in case of need.

It was almost dark when we left Talaimalai village and I switched on the headlights of the Studebaker. Just a mile farther on, the road descended steeply to cross the first of several intersecting streams, all dry at this time of the year, and strung out across the road on the opposite bank of this stream, reflecting the beams from my lights, were the eyes of a herd of bison! The herd galloped away, disturbed by the noise when I changed gear to cross the stream—that is, all of them except the herd-bull, which stood squarely in the centre of the road, his head partly lowered and pawning the ground in a attitude obviously nasty and threatening.

Bisons are generally quite harmless animals and run away at the slightest sight or sound of human beings. Here was one of them behaving rather differently. Perhaps he felt I constituted a danger to the herd. More likely he was puzzled by the headlights of the car and never realized that human beings were behind them. In any case, I did not wish to risk the consequences of a charge. It meant shooting the bull—which I had no desire to do—and quickly, for the signs of an impending charge within the next few seconds were unmistakable. If he succeeded, I knew my Studebaker would be a write-off together with some, if not all of us, who were inside. With my own eyes I have seen a loaded trunk overturned by a charging bison on the Tippakadu road in the Nilgiri jungles; the driver had been killed by the truck itself while the bison had disposed of his assistant and the cleaner by goring and trampling them to pulp.

These unpleasant thoughts passed quickly through my mind. There was just one chance left before using my rifle, and I would have to take it at once. That chance lay in the old klaxon horn fixed to the

right of me on the wind-shield of the Studebaker. Many an elephant had I scared with this same ancient klaxon! Its blatant, brassy blare had made them flee in abject terror. So I tried it again. I pumped the spring lever of that old horn hard and repeatedly. A ghastly sound rent the jungle silence. The bull raised its lowered head, its eyes dilated by fear of what seemed like all hell let loose, and the next moment it plunged into the bamboo undergrowth and vanished from sight.

After that I saw quite a lot of game, which was rather unusual for so early an hour, and incidentally a 'good omen,' so far as hunting superstition goes. Spotted deer and two sambar crossed individually, a sloth bear was digging by the roadside as my lights disturbed him, and a panther leaped from left to right a furlong after I had passed the Honathetti forest lodge and was negotiating a valley between two hillocks, just seven miles from Dimbum.

We arrived at our destination shortly before 8 p.m., which, all said and done, was excellent going, for the track was not only steep and winding but had been in places completely obliterated by the long grass. Hidden boulders lay in that grass, enough to tear open the bottom of any crankcase or differential that bumped against it. In such spots I had had to slow down to a snail's pace, slowly following two of the men as they walked side by side a few yards ahead to warn me of hidden rocks before one of the front wheels of the car banged against them. Then we would all help to roll them aside, or if they were too big to move I would circumvent them by going off the track.

Dimbum is a hamlet on the main road from Mysore City, past the town of Chamrajnagar, down to another large town in the plains named Satyamangalam, which was the headquarters of the police and forest departments for the area. Fifty miles on lies the city of Coimbatore.

All that Dimbum could boast were a few huts and a teashop owned by a Moplah, a descendant of some Arab trader, who centuries earlier had come to the west coast of India for trade but remained to settle down and marry several Hindu Malay alee women. These men have kept their business acumen through the years and there is hardly any trade in which numbers of them do not excel. The teashop at Dimbum was kept open by the Moplah and his three wives throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. Tired lorry drivers ascending the steep ghat-road from Satyamangalam, sixteen miles away, could count on a large mug of steaming tea or coffee at any time of the day or night, together with a hot meal of curry and rice. There was another essential commodity thrown in with the refreshment, and it was free: cool water for their boiling radiators when their trucks arrived in a cloud of steam after that long ascent.

There is a Rest House for travellers, too, and it is beautifully situated upon the edge of the escarpment that overlooks the valley many thousands of feet below. The nearer part of this valley at the base of the escarpment is heavily forested, but the road can be seen winding through the jungle and finally breaking out into the cultivated lands that stretch away to the horizon. In the middle distance is Satyamangalam, while far away on the skyline to the southwest is Coimbatore.

Those jungles at the foot of the hill recall the escapades of the tiger I named 'the mauler of Rajnagara,'* for it was there that I spent some exciting days looking for him without success.

To look upon the plains from this Rest House at nightfall is like looking down into fairyland. The myriad points of electric light, frequently interspersed with coloured lights of every hue, stand out in sharp contrast to the black void. Away to the southwest is an angry glow upon the horizon: the reflection of the lights of Coimbatore, too far away to be seen directly, upon the cloud-layered sky.

I drove to the Moplah's teashop, for that I knew would be the fountainhead of all the information I wanted. Abdulkunni, the ambitious proprietor, knew me well. In fact, I had dropped in for a cup of tea at his place on my way to Hughie's farm and had told him the reason for my visit. He greeted me loudly now and in his high-pitched, excited voice, began pouring out his news.

'Why do you go to Talaimalai looking for your tiger, *sahib*, when it's right here? This morning it killed a woman at the well, just behind this tea shop. A damned nuisance, indeed! We need a great deal of water here, for making tea and for the radiators of the hundred or more lorries that need it every day. This requires many visits to the well and many buckets of water. My three wives have all refused to go there since they heard the news. Disobedient, good-for-nothing bitches, all three of them! I have threatened to kick them out. Even beaten them. But with one accord they told me to go myself. Cannot somebody rid me of these wenches? Now I put it to you, *sahib*. Can I possibly leave the teashop? So I have been compelled to engage a servant on daily wages from today. This costs money and in any case she is a lazy slut! Look *sahib*, as a good Mussulman it is not the custom for me to allow strangers to speak to my womenfolk. But you are a friend, sir. Please talk to my wives and advise them to fetch the water.'

A difficult assignment indeed! Besides, I had better things to do than persuade old Abdulkunni's wives to commit suicide. For that was the fate they would invite by visiting the well with the man-eater about. I could not blame the women for going on strike. Old Abdulkunni thought more of his money than of his wives, but I did not tell him so. It would hurt his feelings.

I said instead, 'I have come to shoot the tiger, Abdulkunni, so if you'll help me, your problem will be solved. Let's not waste time, but tell me exactly how the woman was killed.'

'What is there to say, *sahib*. She went for water. She was returning with it. Then the *shaitan bagh* leapt from the bushes and carried her off into the jungle. She screamed loudly but the tiger only growled. Another woman was going down for water, too, and was but a few yards away when it happened. She heard and saw everything. She ran back to this very place and told us. I had five or six customers here at the time. We bolted and barred the doors and locked ourselves in for nearly two hours. That was another loss of business. It was only when other drivers arrived and banged on the front door that we opened up. Then a large party of us went down to the well. Of the woman there is no sign. Her broken pot remains where it fell from her hands. There is nothing more to tell you.'

'Have there been earlier reports of a tiger in this locality, Abdulkunni? Has anyone else seen it? Did anybody notice anything distinctive about the animal?' I fired the questions rapidly.

But the old man only laughed. 'What can be distinctive about a tiger?' he inquired. 'They all look alike, with a head, four legs and a tail. Besides, why do you ask such silly questions of me? Have I not told you already that nobody except the other woman who was going herself to the well for water saw the tiger? She said it was a huge beast and looked like *shaitan* (the devil) himself.'

One last question I asked, with visions of possibly being able to sit up over the victim's remains of the next day. 'Has, the woman's body been found?'

Abdulkunni's derisive grin widened. 'Who is there to search for it, *sahib*? Do you think we are mad? We are alive now. The woman is dead. If we go in search of her body and the tiger finds us, we too will be dead. And that will not help her!'

How often had I not heard those same words before, spoken in so many different languages, when inquiring if a man-eater's victim or the remains, had been found!

It was evident that the Moplah could give me no further help. I would have to do things for myself and think out some plan. So I ordered two mugs of tea for myself, and a mug each for the men I had brought in the car from Talaimalai, and selecting the cornermost table in the grimy tea shop took out my pipe to smoke while considering the best course of action.

The first thing to do was to get rid of Abdulkunni, who had started talking again. Very frankly I asked him to leave me alone as I wanted to think out a plan.

The old man's behaviour was particularly irritating that day. With

a wicked smirk, he remarked, 'If you want the tiger, why not call it?' Then he went to serve the tea.

Four tracks join at Dimbum, almost directly in front of the tea shop. Or rather, two of them are tracks, while the other two consist of the main road that passes through the hamlet, leading northwards towards Mysore and southwards to Satyamangalam. I have intentionally counted this one main road as two because, so far as searching for the tiger went, he might cross it to the north of Dimbum, or go down the ghat road as it fell away to the south towards Satyamangalam,. The third track was the one I had just travelled, leading from Talavadi and Talaimalai, and the fourth track led into the jungle and was hardly noticeable. It began just behind the Rest House and then wound eastwards through the forest for ten miles or more, keeping more or less to the edge of the continuation of the Dimbum escapement that overlooked the plains as far as the watershed of the Cauvery river, fifty miles to the east.

Being the least used of the four, this last track was the one along which most animals were to be seen, especially bison and sambar. Quite a number of bear came up the escarpment and tigers very often crossed it by steep hidden routes on their long trek of more than fifty miles eastwards, through very dense, jungle and mountain terrain, to the Cauvery river. After about ten miles this track dwindled to a mere footpath that threaded through very heavy bamboo jungles, inhabited more by elephants, bison and sambar than by tigers. For the area is infested by tick, and tigers definitely do not like ticks!

It was pitch-dark outside; an ideal night for using a spotlight in searching for animals.

I could motor up the road towards Mysore for about five miles and then return, shining my spotlight and hoping the man-eater might cross by sheer chance. I could then repeat the performance along the ghat road in the opposite direction. I could even motor along the road I had come from Talaimalai. But motoring along the fourth track to the east would not be advisable. Here I would have to walk. For this track was not only in a very bad state, littered with big stones and full of potholes, but it twisted and turned, and was full of sharp gradients. It entailed far too much gear work and consequent noise, which would drive away the man-eater and any other animal that happened to be near, before I had a chance of seeing them.

Where to begin was anybody's choice and I decided to walk along the eastern track first, while I was still fresh and because it would take the longest time.

Finishing my tea, I paid Abdulkunni and told my four men to catch up with as much sleep as they could while I took a walk up the eastern trail. Not being old acquaintances of mine, they thought I was

mad. Abdulkunni, who had overheard the conversation and who had known me for quite a long time, remarked: 'You think he's mad, eh? That's no discovery! I've known him to be mad for a long time.'

For some reason the old rascal was annoying me more and more that evening. I checked the torch in the .405 and the spare five-cell torch that I intended using for the actual reconnaissance, as it would be far too tiresome to keep pointing the barrel of the rifle about so as to use its torch. Then I walked to the Rest House, stood on the verandah plinth for a few minutes to admire once more the twinkling lights of Satyamangalam, and finally started along the eastern track that began behind the bungalow. With the first turn, that came within a few yards, I was shut off from the friendly light of the petromax lantern hanging in front of the teashop and from the sounds that came from within.

The man-eater had disappeared with his victim and there was no knowing where he had taken her. Tigers have been known to carry their kills for a distance of half-a-mile and even more, although generally they don't go so far. He had killed the woman that morning and no doubt had eaten part of her. The rest he would have to come back for after dark to make a second meal. It was now a little after 9.30 p.m., and as the habits of tigers generally go, the man-eater should have returned by now for his second meal and be enjoying it at this moment, or very likely he would have finished it by now. After all, there is not much meat in an already half-eaten human carcase!

If he had eaten his fill, he would next seek water, and I knew there were three possible places for him to do that. The closest was at a water hole that was skirted by the very track I was following and lay hardly a furlong ahead. The second was by a regular stream that crossed the road to Mysore about two miles away. The third was another stream that I had already passed in the car that evening and was about three miles from Dimbum on the Talaimalai road. Apart from the water hole I was approaching, the man-eater could drink at any point throughout the course of the two streams, and the chance of meeting him over water was extremely slim.

I was approaching the water hole with these thoughts still in my mind, and the first signs of its nearness were a row of blue-green lights in pairs, that kept jerking up and down as they stared into the bright beam of my torch. Spotted deer! Here was a herd, either on its way to the water hole or returning from it.

I stopped abruptly and put out the light to allow the deer a chance of going away quietly. If any of them caught the human scent behind my light, if would surely voice an alarm cry to warn its companions. That cry would also alert the tiger if it was in the vicinity, and I did not want that to happen.

The night was pitch-dark and not a sound came to me from the spotted deer. The silence was intense. Not even a cricket chirped. I did not like it at all. It was eerie.

I switched on the torch. The bobbing pinpoints of light had gone. The deer had vanished in complete silence. That was good, for they had raised no alarm. I waited a few minutes longer to allow them to get far enough away, so as not to scent me or see my torch-beam. Then I started moving forward silently along the track. The next turn would bring me to the water hole that lay to the left.

That was when I heard the splashing and gurgling and loud swishing noises. An elephant was at the water hole and enjoying a bath. I stopped again. His presence was a nuisance, for elephants, like most human beings, like their bath. Once they start, they not only gurgle and drink and bathe and gambol, but they lie in the water and play in it, even if all alone, sometimes for an hour at a stretch. I could not waste so much time waiting for the creature to go away of its own accord. On the other hand, if I advanced and it saw or scented me, the chances were that it might trumpet in alarm and that, again, would warn the man-eater, should he be within earshot, that something strange was moving through the forest, something unusual enough to disturb an elephant. For me to make a noise to frighten away the elephant would be folly for the same reason.

Then I had an idea. I pointed the beam of the torch high up to the treetops in the direction of the water hole in the hope that it might be seen by the elephant and cause him to move off. Evidently I was too far away at first, because he did not see the light. Then I advanced till I was almost at the bend of the track before trying again. This time I succeeded. All sounds of that most enjoyable bath ceased abruptly.

There came a great squelching as the elephant lifted his big body out of the mud, followed by a rhythmic plop-plop-plop-plop of heavy footsteps as he plodded slowly through the water to the bank. Then followed repeated hissing sounds as of escaping steam. Although disturbed by my light, the elephant did not intend to deny himself the last luxury of a sand-bath, and that was what he was doing at that moment; he was throwing sand over himself.

I allowed him time, while continuing to flash the torch from treetop to treetop to keep him sufficiently disturbed. The hissing stopped eventually. It was followed in a little while by faint crackling sounds as the beast moved its heavy way through the undergrowth bordering the water hole. Once again came silence. The elephant had moved off and just then the sharp crack of a breaking branch told me that he had stopped for feed, but far enough away not to be alarmed at my passing.

I negotiated the turn in the track and came upon the water hole

lying limpid and dark before me, a few wisps of vapour already rising from its warmer surface into the rapidly-cooling night air. Hundreds of pin-points of brilliant red light, like tiny rubies scattered over the water, shone in my torchlight, and from the nearer bank bordering the pool came the chorus of frogs. Alarmed by my approach, they had leaped off the bank in great numbers. With vigorous thrusts of their hind legs they propelled themselves into the centre of the pool, where they whirled around to face me, their tiny eyes glistening and reflecting like a thousand rubies.

I had been to such pains to avoid the elephant raising an alarm at my approach only to meet with a singular defeat at the hands of those most insignificant of creatures—the frogs. The tiger heard them, for he happened to be there, and must have seen me and my light simultaneously.

Fortunately for me, he was on the further bank of the pool, where he must have come to drink, and not on the track, or matters may have turned out differently. Under similar circumstances, any normal tiger would have taken himself off quietly and I would never have known of his presence. But this one growled, and continued to growl, the ominous sound rumbling from the darkness at the other end, across the pool and to me as I came to an abrupt and uncertain halt.

The tiny ruby-red eyes of the frogs floating on the surface disappeared altogether, as if some switch had cut off the power, when they dived beneath the surface to escape that awful sound. On the opposite bank of the pool whence the growling arose there was a great disturbance as the myriad frogs that had been resting on the cool sand by the water's edge threw themselves into the pool for safety and with their tiny legs struck out frantically for the centre.

The growling stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The frogs fell into a hushed silence too. I then directed the beam of my torch around the bushes and undergrowth that grew down to the water's edge at the opposite end. Would I see the tiger's eyes glow in the beam? I saw nothing and heard nothing. My light fell only upon the jungle and a deathly silence covered everything.

The tiger had vanished. Had he made off? A normal tiger would do just that, but no normal tiger would have growled at seeing my torchlight. This beast was far from normal. He was angry, and he was unafraid of the approach of man. Was this the man-eater?

I glanced around nervously. My front was safe. To attack from that direction the tiger would have to charge through water and I knew he was very unlikely to do that. Rather, he would come around the pool and attack me from either flank, or from behind. If he chose a flank attack, he would have to charge along the bank or the track, either from the direction I had just come or from the opposite end where the

pathway left the pool. More probably he would attack from the rear, where the jungle bordered the edge of the track and not two yards from where I was standing. Then I would have no chance whatever.

There was but one thing to do and I did it very quickly. I scrambled down the sloping bank into the water and, feeling the way before me with each footstep, made for the middle of the pool as fast as I could. I knew it was not very deep and there I would be safe from attack from any direction. No tiger—not even a man-eater, at least not in my experience—would attack across water, and even if it did, the tables would be turned entirely in my favour. I would have the tiger in the open and completely at my mercy, long before he could reach me.

The water had reached a little above my knees when the tiger growled again. This time it was a loud growl, almost a roar. And it came from the jungle bordering the track, from the very direction in which I had expected the attack. Had I not sought the safety of the pool just in time, the tiger would have launched itself upon me. He was growling with fury now at finding me beyond reach.

But was I really beyond reach? The next few moments would answer that question. Of one fact I had no doubt whatever: I was dealing with the man-eater and no ordinary tiger. The hate in its behaviour clearly showed that. Hughie's bullet had turned this animal into a fiend.

I waited in vain. The tiger did not emerge. The growling stopped as unexpectedly as it had started, and once again I was plunged into silence with a sea of darkness around me. I played the beams of my torch in every direction as I turned slowly around, hoping to catch a glimpse of the beast's eyes as they reflected the light, or of the striped body slinking from bush to bush. But I saw and heard nothing.

The myriads of frogs that had experienced such a disturbing night, first with the arrival of the elephant, then myself, and finally the tiger, all went below the surface of the water when I waded into it. But they could not remain submerged for long and had to come up for breath. One by one they came to the surface now, soundlessly, to gulp in air, and soon the nearer edge of the wide circle of light thrown by my torch once more revealed hundreds of pairs of tiny red eyes gazing on me in fear.

A long time seemed to have passed since I left the tea shop, but a quick glance at my watch showed it was only 10.30 p.m. How long would I have to wait for the tiger to move, if he moved at all?

I began to get tired of standing in the water. It grew colder and colder and wreaths of vapour arose from the surface of the pool, obscuring the jungle around its edges and making it difficult for the light of my torch to penetrate. At the same time, I realized that if I got back to the pathway I would be at the mercy of the man-eater should

he decide to ambush me at any spot along the track. I felt certain he had not gone away but was biding his time till I came out of the water.

Midnight, and it was biting cold! By now I realized I must not shine my torch continuously, for the five cells would run down and under no circumstances could I risk using up the cells of the other torch, clamped to my rifle, for the accuracy of my shooting depended on them. So I extinguished the light and was plunged abruptly into darkness. That was when I noticed that the night was cloudy, with no stars to be seen.

However, there was no danger so long as I remained in the water. My hearing would warn me of the approach of any animal.

Very soon, that was what happened. An elephant came, perhaps the same one I had disturbed earlier. Probably another. I was standing still and he did not hear or see me. The wind was blowing from him to me, so he could not scent me. I felt I was safe, for in any case his sight was too poor to penetrate the mist that had settled over the whole pool like a thick bank of fog, and he would not be able to see me.

I heard the loud 'foofff-fooofff-fooofff' as he exhaled air though his trunk, and then the sucking noises as he drew in water and splashed it into his mouth and over his body. He drank and he drank, a seemingly endless number of gallons of water.

At last he decided to have a regular bath and I heard the tremendous plop-plop-plop of his great feet approaching me as he waded through the water towards the centre of the pool. This would never do, I thought. So I shone the torch straight into his face.

That night was for me one in which I seemed fated to meet animals of strange behaviour. According to all the rules of the game, the elephant should have turned tail and bolted from my bright light, but he did nothing of the kind. He trumpeted shrilly, coiled up his trunk, and charged me.

Taken aback, instead of putting the five-cell quickly into its pouch at the left side of my belt, so as to leave both my hands free to handle my rifle, I missed the pouch and dropped the torch into the water. Out it went.

There was no time to retrieve it. The charging elephant was dangerously close. I brought the .405 to my shoulder while pressing the button of the smaller torch that was clamped to its barrel with my left thumb. The beam cut through the darkness as I aimed a foot above the head of the elephant and fired in an attempt to halt that charge.

No rogue elephant had been proclaimed by the Forestry Department and so, as far as possible, I should try to avoid killing this animal. I had erred by letting him come too close to me and I should

not have shone the torch directly in his face.

As these thoughts rushed through my mind, I awaited the result of that deterring shot. If he still came on, I would be forced to stop him with my next bullet or he would kill me. There was no doubt of that.

Luckily it worked. The great beast braked to a halt by planting all four feet firmly in the mud. The impetus of the rush brought him on, skidding ludicrously in the clay till he ended up sitting on his hindquarters like an elephant at the circus. Encouraged by his failing nerve, I fired a second time, again over his head. The elephant turned and bolted.

When the noise and tumult had died away I felt disgusted, but at the same time relieved. My two shots must have driven away the man-eater. My chance of success was gone. But now I was safe also and could at last get out of the water.

Shivering with the cold, I started my walk back to Dimbum. I knew I had only a short distance to cover, but there was always the danger that the man-eater, driven from the immediate vicinity of the pool by the sound of my shots, might still be lurking somewhere along the pathway and might ambush me.

At last the lights of Satyamangalam, twinkling in the black void of the plains below me, put an end to my tension. I got into the Rest House, took off my wet pants and, as I had brought no change of clothes, went to sleep without them.

A banging on the door awakened me. I had closed all the windows and it was dark inside, but a glance at my watch surprised me. It was 9.30 a.m.

I put on my pants again. They were still wet. The banging on the door was renewed, this time more urgently, and I could hear the murmur of voices on the verandah.

I opened the front door. Confronting me was Abdulkunni himself, his three wives and four or five other people, all in a great state of excitement. Obviously the tea shop had been closed down. Something very serious must have happened.

'Come quickly, sahib,' called the excited Moplah. 'The tiger has just carried away the girl we employed to fetch the water.'

Grabbing my rifle and some cartridges, I hastened with the group to the teashop, while he quickly told the story.

Barely thirty minutes earlier the girl had taken a basket of cooking utensils to wash at the well behind the tea shop. She had decided it would be easier that way than carrying a pitcher or more of water to the building for the purpose. One of the wives had been watching her from the back door to ensure she did not linger unduly over the task. The girl, a maiden of about eighteen years, was bending down, absorbed in her work, when a movement behind her had caught the

eye of the watching woman. She had glanced in that direction and was horrified to see a tiger, belly to the ground, sneaking stealthily upon the unsuspecting servant girl from behind. The woman had screeched a warning. The girl heard and jumped to her feet. But the tiger drove home his charge. He had leapt upon his victim and, not waiting to kill her, had taken the unfortunate girl in his mouth and leaped back into the cover of the undergrowth. Terrible screams could be heard long after the tiger and victim had disappeared from sight.

Alarmed by his wife's yells and hearing distant wailing, Abdulkunni and the other members of the household had rushed to the rear door to find out the cause of the disturbance. Then they had come in a body to the Rest House. The man-eater had taken another victim at nine in the morning, and exactly where he had killed only a few hours earlier! This was something unheard of in the annals of man-eaters.

Telling everyone to remain indoors, I hastened to the well. The scattered utensils, some washed and the others not, showed that the girl had been taken by surprise while engrossed in her task, and a single sliding pug-mark indicated where the tiger had stopped his rush to seize his victim and had slipped on the wet earth where the girl had been doing her washing. There were no other marks on the surrounding earth, trampled flat as it was by the feet of the many people who came there all day long to draw water, and baked by the sun's rays. The ground was far too hard to carry pug-marks, while the girl had been grabbed so quickly that there was no blood trail of any kind.

The woman who had witnessed the killing, Abdulkunni's second wife, called to me from the doorway, pointing out the direction in which the man-eater had gone with his victim, and I followed it. The clearing in which the well stood ended abruptly in a wall of lantana bushes that fringed the jungle. No tiger, carrying his prey, would dream of forcing himself through this tangled obstruction. It would be impossible for any beast. There must be some other way and I started to look for it. I found it eventually, a game-*path*, close to the ground, tunnelling at a height of not more than four feet through the lower branches of the lantana. It had been made by wild pigs during the rainy season, when they visited the clearing to root and dig in the swamp which would at that season surround the well. In places the tiger had had to crawl along this tunnel, dragging its victim, and I followed suit, crouching low and at times on hands and knees.

Within a few yards I came upon the first evidence of the tragedy. Some torn shreds of a sari and a quantity of blood on the lantana leaves that littered the game-trail. Probably the victim had been struggling to free herself and this was where the tiger had killed her.

After that there was a regular blood trail, and more shreds of the sari caught on the lantana. There came a bend in the tunnel and here the remains of the girl's clothing had caught on a thorny bush. The man-eater must have become angry and wrenched his victim free, for the scraps of a sari and a skirt had been torn from her body and were hanging on the thorns. With the removal of all her clothing the blood had fallen directly on the ground and leaves, making a ghastly red trail through the tunnel.

I could not know how far the tiger had carried his victim. Probably the screeching and screaming from the tea shop had made him decide to go to a quieter place before commencing his meal. At least, I hoped so. For if he was anywhere near and attacked me from my rear, I was completely at his mercy in this death-trap of a tunnel.

This thought caused me to stop frequently to listen. He might give himself away by growling. Tigers often do that when followed. Partly in anger, partly as a warning, but more often to strengthen their own courage. For all their lives have been spent in pursuing a fleeing prey and it is an unusual and terrifying experience for any tiger to realize he is the object of pursuit himself. Not a sound did I hear. Complete silence filled that twisting tunnel.

At last the lantana began to give way to jungle proper. The tunnel came to an end and I was able to stand upright. There was a grassy glade through which the blood trail led before it merged into a park-like jungle of *babul* and box-flower shrubs with grass between. I judged that I had not far to go now before meeting the tiger, who must have started his meal. That is, provided the man-eater had not heard me and realized he was being followed. If that had happened, he might take himself off altogether or lie in wait for me at some spot close to his kill. He might even creep forward to intercept me, or ambush me from either side or from the rear.

Then I heard a crow cawing some distance away. I listened carefully, and there was no mistaking that persistent cawing. The crow was watching the tiger with his victim and was excitedly calling reinforcements to be ready to enjoy the feast that was soon to follow.

Sounds and the distances from which they emanate are difficult to locate and estimate correctly in the forest. Air currents, the density of tree growth and the terrain all make difficulties. In flat country conditions are not quite so bad, but in hilly areas like this, sounds and distances are often unjudgable.

I reckoned the crow was about sixty to seventy yards away, and slowly, very stealthily, studying the ground before me so as not to tread upon a dried twig or stone and so betray myself, I advanced step by step. I do not know how far I had gone when I heard the first sounds of the feast. The sharp crack of a bone being broken, followed

by crunching and tearing.

The crow was still cawing excitedly. I reckoned that I was within thirty yards now, possibly a good deal less. I stopped and began to think.

The crow offered a greater risk at that moment than the tiger. For he was sitting on a tree and had the advantage of height. I knew that if he saw me he would cease cawing at once. He might even fly away. The man-eater, engrossed in his meal, knew that the crow was watching him but had ignored the bird and his cawing as a matter of no consequence. A sudden end to that cawing and the sudden departure of the crow would tell the tiger at once that something had alarmed the bird, that some danger to himself was approaching. For crows fear no other bird and ignore the presence of wild animals. They fear only the human race.

But I had not yet alarmed the crow. At a snail's pace, with infinite caution, I advanced, crouching low, shuffling forward and halting again, watching the ground in front of me before making any movement, glancing to right and left and even looking behind when the tearing and crunching sounds ceased for a moment. For so long as I could hear those sounds I knew the tiger was in front. When they ceased I could no longer know where he was. There lay the greatest danger, for he might creep upon me from behind. Man-eaters generally snatch their victims that way.

Suddenly an uncanny silence fell over everything. At first I could not account for it. Then I knew the cause. The crow had stopped cawing! Undoubtedly something was afoot. Then I saw the crow, but too late. He had seen me first. With what seemed a tremendous fluttering, he flew to another tree.

And I was right: the man-eater had become suspicious. He had started to move. Was he moving away from me or towards me? Was he trying to escape or attack? As these questions raced through my mind, with the corner of my eye I saw the crow rise again. This time he flew out of sight.

I froze in my tracks. But it was too late. The cunning crow flew back to investigate and perched at almost the same spot as the one where I saw him first. He turned his head sideways for a better view of me, cawed and bobbed. Convinced that I was dangerous, he fluttered his wings and then flew to yet another tree to turn around and watch me.

I stopped watching the crow and stared at the bushes all around. And I turned about to watch the bushes behind me. There was a pricking sensation at the back of my neck. Every cell of my body warned me that I was in great danger. I knew that the man-eater was about to pounce.

But I simply could not see him, stare as I might at the undergrowth all around. The jungle was ominously silent. Not a twig cracked, not a leaf stirred. The birds and insects were silent, so too were the bushes and the long grass that grew between the trees. I looked in vain for the stirring of a branch or a blade of grass, the bending of a sapling stem that might betray movement below and the passage of a creeping body.

But there was not a movement anywhere, not a sound. I knew that the tiger was employing all his skill to make his last rush a complete surprise.

And then there came to my mind the scene I had witnessed many years before by moonlight, beside a jungle pool in the heart of a deep forest far away. A sambar hind was approaching the water hole cautiously. All was silent. Suddenly, for no reason whatever, she wheeled noisily and rushed away. The ruse worked then, for the tiger patiently lying in wait to ambush her a few yards further on, now lost his head. He thought his prey was about to escape and he bounded after her. But the hind had too much of a start and got away to safely.

Now I did the same thing. But I did not turn and run back, for something warned me that the man-eater was already there. I stamped noisily and ran forward diagonally, but only for four paces. Then I stopped.

As on that moonlit night so many years before, the simple ruse worked again. The man-eater roared and bounded after me from behind. He took two leaps and then halted in crouching amazement as this strange man before him, instead of continuing to run, turned around and fired rapidly.

The tiger knew no more after that, but I know that if I had not heeded that warning of his very close presence behind me, or if I had run backwards instead of forwards, I would not be here to tell this tale.

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* See *Man-eaters and Jungle Killers*, Chapter 8.

Five

The Killer of the Wynaad

TO THE SOUTHWEST OF THE CITY OF MYSORE LIES THE HEAVILY forested area of the Kakankote jungles, for centuries the home of many herds of wild elephants that are partial to the kind of jungle that grows in this district. The rainfall is heavy and the vegetation is luxurious. Giant bamboos, rank grass and mighty trees grow together in dense profusion, and a passage through the forest, except for the elephants and the large and harmless bison, is almost impossible. Sambar and barking deer are found in the thinner areas, but as one moves farther southwest and the rainfall and the denseness of the jungle increase in direct ratio to each other, the deer become fewer and fewer, leaving the elephants and bison in almost entire possession of what appears from the narrow road to be primeval, virgin jungle.

Still further on is the Kabini river, one of the natural boundaries between Mysore state to the northeast and Kerala state, in the extreme southwest. In my opinion, the state of Kerala, in the extreme southwest of the Indian peninsula, offers a scenery second only in beauty to that of the Himalayas, though very different. It is a land of dense forests, fertile plantations of tea, coffee, cinnamon, rubber and tapioca, and emerald-green fields in the areas bordering the sea; of gently flowing rivers and waterways without number, along which palm-thatched river boats glide among coconut palms laden with huge bunches of green nuts, and a sea coast without parallel, culminating at the southern tip of the peninsula in the famous beach of Cape

Comorin.

The town of Manantoddy, on the Kerala side of the border, stands on the Western Ghats, the range of mountains that run down the west coast of India, almost from Bombay to the far south, at an average elevation of about 4,000 feet above sea level. This district is known as the North Wynaad, to differentiate it from the country a few miles further south, which abuts the Nilgiri Mountain and is known as the South, or Nilgiri, Wynaad. Both areas are extremely fertile, enjoy a heavy rainfall, and are the site of many plantations, producing every conceivable crop.

Pleasant as they are in all other respects, these regions abound in leeches throughout the year, and in the rainy season their numbers are enormous. Moreover, that curse of the drier jungles, the tick, thrives in yet greater comfort than it does in the forests of the interior—both the large crab-tick that gives you tick-fever when it bites you in sufficient numbers, and the microscopic jungle, or grass-tick, smaller than a pin's head, that provokes a small sore wherever it has sucked your blood. Since it bites you all over the body, in hundreds of places, you become a very sore creature indeed, covered with sores that last for many months. You scratch and scratch yourself, night and day, into a mental and physical wreck.

Leeches and ticks suck the blood not only of a human being, but of animals as well. Even the bison suffer, while tigers, panthers and deer become covered with them, especially ticks, so that they hang from the softer portions of these animals' bodies, gorged with blood, like bunches of small grapes.

For this reason, the jungles of the Wynaad hold few carnivorous animals or deer. Now and then a stray animal may roam in during the dry summer months to brave the discomforts, but with the advent of the rains they move to the higher ranges of the Western Ghats, or the drier areas of East Kakankote to escape from the leeches and ticks till the monsoon abates with the approach of winter.

Thus it came about that, when a traveller journeying from Kakankote to Manantoddy was taken by a tiger just within a few hundred yards of the outskirts of the latter, it was regarded as a quite unusual event. Tigers had been seen in these parts but were few in number, and no human had been harmed for as long as anybody could remember. The event was soon forgotten and many months passed.

Then, across the border in the state of Mysore, preparations were started for the next *kheddah* operation, in which many wild elephants were to be caught. Coolies were engaged in hundreds to build the mighty wooden stockade into which they would later drive the elephants before the gate was dropped and the bewildered beasts captured. Much preliminary work was required; timber had to be

felled, the forest cleared, bamboos gathered and bound together and then moved to the spot selected for the stockade. This required not only hard work but experienced workers. Men from the jungle tribes, the Karumbas and the Sholagas, provided most of the recruits, for they were experienced not only in tree-felling and bamboo-binding, but in the ways of the elephants, in driving them into the stockade, and in roping and shackling them and taming them afterwards.

That was when the tiger struck, a second and a third time, before people realized that a man-eater was amongst them.

Two Karumbas vanished within three days of each other and the half-eaten remains of the first showed he had been devoured by a tiger. The body of the second Karumba, like that of the traveller to Manantoddy, was never seen again.

There is another way of getting to Manantoddy from Mysore city, and that is via Coorg, which was for years an independent state but has recently joined Mysore. It is a more circuitous route, but the scenery is even more picturesque. Like the Kakankote road, this route traverses dense jungle inhabited by elephants and bison, where tigers are practically unknown for the reasons already explained.

The Coorgies are a hardy, lively people. In olden days the British conferred a special honour upon them unknown elsewhere in India. Every Coorgie living within the limits of his state was exempted from possessing an arms licence, no matter how many weapons he possessed. This privilege is, I believe, still maintained by the Indian government. It was a laudable gesture but it had one bad result. The Coorgies never abused their privilege by using their weapons against each other or against other people, but they exercised it against the fauna of their beautiful little state to such an extent that the deer have been practically exterminated.

I know a large number of Coorgie families, most of whom are coffee planters, owning wide estates where the coffee berry flourishes to perfection, with oranges as a profitable secondary crop, and I happened to be a guest of one of these families when news of the man-eater trickled through.

The estate where I was staying was situated about midway between the towns of Sidapur and Virajpet, and at a considerable distance from both Manantoddy and Kakankote, where all three killings had occurred. Further, I had not brought my rifle with me from Bangalore, as I knew there was no shooting, at least of the kind in which I was interested, to be had in Coorg. So, when my friend gave me the news one morning over his breakfast table, I listened to it dispassionately, wondering like him as to how a man-eating tiger had found its way into an area so unpropitious, where ordinary tigers and panthers are almost unknown. But my friend waxed enthusiastic and

suggested we go after it.

I told him I did not think much of the idea. In my opinion, the animal was not a confirmed man-eater, but was probably a sick or wounded tiger, or perhaps one that had escaped from one of the many miniature circuses that are always touring the country, and had strayed there because of the heavy jungles. I felt that it would either die of its sickness or wounds, or would soon leave these unfavourable haunts and move into normal tiger country, where it could find an abundance of its natural food, when it would stop man-hunting of its own accord. Besides, as I reminded him, I had not brought my rifle.

Timayya, for that was my host's name, offered to bet that I was wrong. The tiger would remain where he was, he affirmed. As for a rifle! He had five, from which I could make my choice.

I reminded my friend that to do so would be illegal. His weapons were unlicensed. It was a part of the stipulation that he, as a Coorgie, was forbidden to lend his unlicensed weapons to a non-Coorgie. And in any case, it was against the rules for anybody, even a licence-holder like myself, to borrow another man's weapon.

Timayya laughed at me, and said, 'What rot!' Then, banteringly, he bet me ten rupees that the tiger would kill again before the week was out. Rather huffed at his words, I took him on.

Timayya won that bet; for on the third day we heard that the tiger had killed again. This time the victim was a woman. She had been washing clothes on the further bank of the Kabini river, just within the limits of Kerala state. And Timayya's free arms permit was not valid in Kerala state.

My friend had set his heart on going after this tiger. I suppose to him, being something unusual, it became a must, and he stated flatly that I was included in the party.

Frankly, I was not keen; but to continue to refuse would have strained our relations. I had known Timayya for a long time, in fact we had been at school together, and stubbornness had always been his failing and his virtue! The estate, when he had bought it cheaply, was considered by the neighbours to be a complete 'write off.' The soil was said to be no good, the variety of coffee that grew there was no good, the shade trees were no good, and so forth! But Timayya was determined to buy. He bought; he worked hard; and he made good.

So I gave in on one condition. I would go back to Bangalore for my .405 and bring along my .450/400 as a spare rifle. He would accompany me. Then we would return to Mysore city from where we would motor directly to Kakankote and the Kerala border. I stressed that I would much rather incur the expense of the additional 240 miles of motoring than be mixed up in arms licence disputes with the police of two states.

Timayya concurred, left his weapons behind and came with me to Bangalore the same night. We spent the next day in buying provisions for a fifteen-day camp in the jungles of the border where we knew no foodstuff, acceptable to our civilized palates, would be available. Timayya bought a jar of some patent cream and a huge tin of D.D.T. as protection against the leeches and ticks. We carried mosquito nets too, along with my small tent, a portable *charpoy machan*, batteries and torches, and my two rifles. Timayya said he did not want to shoot but would rather watch the fun. Knowing him as I did, I realized this was not strictly true.

We arrived at Kakankote on the afternoon of the second day and then drove to the *kheddah* site to try to pick up what information we could about the tiger. As I anticipated, there was little to learn. So many coolies were about, working on the project, that no one appeared to know exactly when and where the tiger had taken his two victims. But rumour and universal fear were rife. The men had just vanished and their absence had not been noticed for two days or so. Even then it was only by mere chance that, being attracted by the stench of putrefying flesh, some travellers had gone to investigate and found some scanty remains.

Many people had theories to account for the presence of a man-eater in that zone, but not one of them had seen the animal. What they had to say boiled down to the belief that an evil spirit was operating in the forest in the guise of a tiger. This instilled an even greater fear into the coolies, so much so that we knew if another of them was killed, the *kheddah* operation would come to a stop. Such a happening, or even a postponement in the date, would be in the nature of a calamity to the local government, which had invited certain V.I.P.s from abroad as guests at the trapping.

Next morning, we motored the short distance to the Kerala border and came to the hamlet on the further bank of the Kabini river from which the latest victim—the woman who had been washing clothes—had been taken. Once more, nobody had seen the tiger. Only its pug-marks on the river bank, the trail of something that had been dragged away, and a few drops of blood on the leaves and earth had revealed a man-eater's visit.

We went on to Manantoddy and made inquiries at that small town regarding the first victim, the traveller who had been coming from Kakankote. Here again nobody knew anything. A forest guard, returning to his quarters near the Forest Range Office, had come across an odd sandal by the roadside. As it was good sandal, and people do not usually throw their footwear away, he stopped to look at it. That was when he noticed the other sandal lying on the sloping bank of a stream that ran parallel to the road. He walked down to see

that too, and found a turban entangled in the bracken that grew by the waterside. Then he looked at the ground and saw the pug-marks of a tiger in the mud. They were deeply embedded in the ooze, indicating that the animal had been carrying additional weight, while a few carmine splashes on the fern leaves revealed the truth.

Blood! The tiger had been carrying away the wearer of the sandals and the turban.

We interviewed this guard and heard the story from his own lips. And that brought us to the end of the trail. There was nothing more we could learn, and we did not know where to make a start. Timayya confessed that he was sorry he had urged me to start upon this wild-goose chase.

Manantoddy is a beautiful place and we spent the night at the inspection bungalow which was fortunately vacant. Unlike most of the bungalows in other states, it is fully furnished with comfortable beds and foam mattresses, has neon lights and electric fans, and stands on a hillside opposite the ruins of an old British dwelling house that had its own private cemetery.

This is the land of fireflies. They come out after dark in their thousands, and the twinkling of their little lights are a fitting background to the chorus of the hundreds of small frogs, known as the 'Wynaad' or 'tok-tok' frog, and the hauntingly-sweet, never-to-forgotten aroma of sprays of the 'Rath-ki-Rani,' the 'Queen of the Night' blooms that open only after dark. We lay in armchairs, smoking tranquilly as we listened to the endless 'tok-tok-tok-tok-tok' of the frogs. Now and again a firefly would find its way into the room through the open window, its little light eclipsed by the brilliance of the neon tube that lit the room.

The next morning we made a leisurely start, our intention being to motor by the direct route to Virajpet in Coorg state, and thence to Timayya's plantation, where I would drop him, stay a day myself, and then go on to Mysore city and back to Bangalore.

We had travelled over ten miles from Manantoddy and were negotiating a stretch of dense forest; mostly of bamboo, on the Kerala bank of the Kabini river, when we saw a party of men approaching us, carrying a litter. And this is where my story really begins, for on the litter was a man, his tattered clothing soaked with his blood.

The bearers told us they were bamboo cutters and had been working on contract by the riverside, just over a mile away, when shortly after dawn that morning and without warning, a tiger had suddenly charged upon two of them, in full view of the others, and struck down one, whom it had grabbed by the shoulder and begun to drag away.

But the two men were brothers, and the one the tiger had ignored

was very brave. He had run after the beast with the large curved knife he had been using to cut bamboos.

Seeing he was pursued, the man-eater had started to gallop away, still carrying his victim. The pursuer, realizing he had no hope of catching up with the tiger to save his brother, had then hurled his knife at the departing animal in sheer desperation. Luck favoured him, for the heavy weapon struck the carnivore in its flank. Either in pain, or from fright, the man-eater dropped his victim and bounded into the bamboos.

The hero of this episode, who was one of the men carrying the litter, had then assembled the scattered bamboo cutters and mobilized them into a team to help carry his sorely stricken brother to the nearest hospital, which was at Manantoddy.

There was no time to be lost and we acted quickly. Bundling the mauled man, with two others to help him, into the Studebaker, I told Timayya to turn around and drive them as fast as he could to the hospital, where he could leave the wounded man. He would then drive back to the bamboo cutters' camp, directed by the two men who were with him, while I went ahead on foot with the rest to see if we could find the tiger.

While Timayya was still turning the car I started at a jog-trot for the camp, the brave brother, whose name I learned was Yega, running beside me while the rest of the party followed behind. There was not a minute to be lost. In all probability the man-eater was miles away by this time, but there was just the slimmest of chances that he might still be lingering in the vicinity.

We reached the encampment in good time, but did not stop till we came to the place where the tiger had dropped his victim. There was a rank undergrowth of weeds covering the ground that showed no pug-marks, but on the bright green leaves were splashes of red—fresh blood that had not yet had time to dry. Whether the blood came from Yega's brother, who had been dropped here, or from a wound made by the knife in the man-eater's flank, we could not at that moment tell.

At this spot I halted the men who had followed and whispered to them to return to their camp. Yega and I would see this thing through together. The presence of many people would frighten the man-eater away, if it happened to be still nearby.

The bent heads of the undergrowth showed the direction in which the man-eater had run after dropping his victim, and I followed Yega, alert for a surprise attack at any moment and from any direction, particularly our rear. He tiptoed in front with bent head, examining the foliage and such glimpses of the dark 'black cotton-soil' type of earth as he could see between the green stems of the crowded plants.

Yega was looking for his knife. We wanted to make sure if his

heavy weapon had actually hurt the tiger or not. If it had really done so, we might expect the animal to act quite differently from what he would have done if the blow from the knife had been a glancing one. Most likely, if injured, the tiger would roar and charge us from a fair distance; but if uninjured the man-eater would either attack only when we came fairly close to him, or slink away.

My part of the business now was to watch the jungle more carefully than ever before, ahead on both sides, and also behind, to protect us against a surprise attack. I could not help Yega in his search.

Then we found the knife. Its edge was clean, with no trace of blood. The tiger had not been hurt and the blood we had passed had come from the wounded man.

We crept forward for some distance and stopped. Then Yega shook his head slowly from side to side. The man-eater had stopped running.

We followed for another furlong, when the trail of our quarry petered out. Here the animal had crossed an area of lemon-grass, which is a scented variety with leaves that are largely used for distilling an essential oil. This grass has long, hard tough stems which had bent with the man-eater's passing and then regained their position, so that no trace now remained of the direction in which he had gone. The earth between the large clumps of this lemon grass was a matted carpet of decaying stems and seedlings, showing not the faintest trace of a pug-mark.

Quickening our pace, we cut directly across the lemon grass area, which extended for perhaps a quarter of a mile, to where the jungle began again. But the tiger's trail could not be found again and we were forced to conclude that we had lost him.

Apart from his courage, perseverance was another quality in which this little bamboo cutter was strong. He refused to admit defeat and urged in a whisper that we should go on and on till we eventually found the tiger. Stimulated by his keenness, I entered into the spirit of the chase and we pressed forward for many miles and most of the remaining hours of that day. We passed two herds of bison and a family of wild elephants and it was past 3 p.m., before we finally turned back for the bamboo cutters' camp. This we reached after dark, at 7.30 p.m. I was covered with leech bites and with ticks, and I was unutterably tired, although glad that we had at last come to grips with the man-eater and had such a stout henchman as Yega to assist.

Timayya had returned in the car many hours earlier and was eagerly awaiting our news. Unfortunately, I had none to give him.

We decided to return to the inspection bungalow at Manantoddy, which was only eleven miles away, for the night and to the bamboo cutters' camp the next morning. The prospect of spending the night

with them, lying on the ground, with the mosquitoes and what not, was too terrible to contemplate.

That was where I made a big mistake. For when we did arrive the next morning we found the little camp in terrible confusion and all the bamboo cutters huddled together in a single hut. They swarmed out, led by Yega, to report that the man-eater had returned in the dead of the night. He had crept up and snatched one of them from beneath the walls of a hut!

Now you may wonder how a tiger could do that, but the explanation is simple. The huts which the bamboo cutters had constructed were but temporary shelters in the jungle which they would leave as soon as their work was done. They were built of split bamboos and leaves, and the sides of the structures were never allowed to touch the ground. For if they did, the termites—or white ants, as they are better known—would creep up into the walls in a matter of hours and the whole hut would be destroyed in no time. So a gap was left right round the hut, the ends of such bamboos as had necessarily to be embedded in the ground being first defended by a coating of tar.

The man-eater must indeed have been starving. Perhaps being deprived of his victim the previous day had whetted his appetite. He had returned in the early hours of the morning and, emboldened by the silence that reigned over the slumbering camp, had wandered up to the four huts. There, through the gap below the wall of one of them, he had seen the form of a sleeping man. The rest was easy to the hungry, daring beast. He had crept up to the hut and stretched his paw under the gap, fastening his claws into the sleeping man. The man had screamed for help, but no one had had the presence of mind to do anything and the man-eater had dragged his victim out of the hut, tearing down the lower portion of one of the walls in the process.

Unfortunately for the victim, Yega the one person who might have given help, was not in that hut but in the one furthest away, enabling the tiger to make a clean getaway. The bamboo cutters related in horror that they had had to listen to the poor man's screams for a very long time after the tiger dragged him out of the hut. Strangely, it had not killed him while he yelled and screamed, as man-eaters generally do when their victims make a noise. This animal had carried him away screaming and his comrades had heard his cries grow fainter and fainter as his captor bore him away.

Yega offered to accompany me at once, but the other coolies were utterly demoralized. They remained huddled in a group, calling to God to help them while they rained invectives upon the tiger. There were nine of them, excluding Yega. So I asked Timayya to squeeze them into the Studebaker, even if it came to letting a couple stand on

the footboard, and to take them back to Manantoddy and safety without delay. He was then to return to the camp site and wait for me, but while doing so was not to leave the car on any account. In any case, he had my .405/400. with him, so there was no danger of his being unable to protect himself.

Yega and I then took up the trail of the man-eater.

The ground was soft outside the huts and had been cleared of the usual weeds in an effort to keep away the ticks and the leeches. This helped us to find the tiger's footprints, both as he had approached the hut and when he had left, carrying his victim with him. Whatever part of the poor man's anatomy had been grasped by the tiger was clearly not a vital region, for the victim had struggled and kicked the ground, as tell-tale marks revealed. At one place he had grasped the stem of a sapling and must have held on tenaciously. The tiger had literally torn him free, as could be seen by the particles of skin from the palms of the man's hands that still adhered to the stem and the markedly increased quantity of blood on the ground and leaves at that spot. No doubt this had resulted from an enlargement of the wound as the tiger dragged his victim free.

Now we were able to follow the trail with ease. The poor man had bled terribly and splashes of blood on the weeds, grass and leaves marked the way the tiger had passed. A queer sensation of nausea came over me as I pictured that horrible scene at dead of night in the blackness of the jungle, and the victim's realization that he was to be devoured, that nothing and no one could save him, and that he would never see his wife and children again.

At last we reached the spot where the tiger must have felt he had had enough of his victim's cries and struggles. Here he had laid the man on the ground and, releasing his grip, had bitten him again and again till his wails had been stilled for ever.

All this was written in the marks on the ground and the pool of blood that had streamed from those last fierce and fatal bites. After that the man-eater had continued his journey.

We followed for another furlong, and here at last the tiger had decided to begin his meal. He had left the narrow trail and turned into a small hollow in the ground, sheltered by grass, bushes and bracken, where he had set about devouring the unfortunate bamboo cutter. As we had surmised, the beast must have been hungry, for little remained of the man beyond the usual parts: the head, hands and feet, and a small portion of his chest, with rib bones bereft of flesh. The entrails had been torn out and dragged aside. The meat had been removed from the victim's pelvis, exposing the bone, and the thighs had also been devoured, here again leaving the bare bones in evidence of the great feast.

Far less than a quarter of the poor man remained, but this was enough to make the tiger return that night for a second meal, provided we played our cards cunningly enough and did not arouse his suspicions.

Yega and I looked around and at this point we encountered our first setback. There was no tree within at least eighty yards, a range far too great, as I well knew from past experience, to risk a shot by torchlight at night.

To the uninitiated this may seem an exaggeration. Eighty yards in daylight might appear a mere stone's throw. But those who have sat on *machans* in a jungle at night will know what I mean. Bushes, leaves, blades of grass and rocks all cause obstructions at this distance, and to attempt to cut them away, to ensure a better view when the tiger returned, might arouse his suspicions and prevent him from returning at all. Remember, I could not risk wounding him. I had to shoot to kill.

Tigers and panthers, and man-eaters especially, are very cautious when they come back to their kills. They reconnoitre the approaches to the spot for a long time before they show themselves, and if they feel or sense anything suspicious, if they find any cut branches scattered about, any removal of bushes or undergrowth or rocks, or any addition of leaves or branches that may conceal a hidden enemy, they will give the spot a wide berth and never return. Although he lacks a sense of smell, the tiger makes up for this handicap with an uncanny caution and an ability almost to read the hunter's mind and anticipate his every action.

As if to compensate for the distance of the nearest tree from the remains of the woodsman, a dense patch of tiger-grass bordered the bank of the small depression into which the tiger had taken him before beginning his meal, and this patch was barely fifteen feet away.

If I could hide in that grass without the man-eater becoming aware of my presence he would offer a point-blank target. The moon would rise early, and conditions would be in my favour, always provided the tiger did not become aware of my presence. Would this be possible? For if he did find out, the situation could turn into a most unpleasant one for me.

As I well knew, all tigers and especially man-eaters, which appear to be endowed with a fiendish cunningness, exceeding even the natural caution of their kind, have a habit of taking advantage of every vestige of natural cover when returning to the remains of their victims for a second meal. The clump of tiger grass in which I contemplated concealing myself lay in the direct path of the man-eater's return and so close to his victim that it was more than likely, if not certain, that he would make use of it to conceal his own approach.

And however silent I might be, I knew well enough how silent would be his own coming. Should the man-eater discover me before I discovered him, the bamboo cutter's bones would have those of another to keep them company before many hours had passed. It was a gamble, with a heavy stake, that I would have to take.

In order not to disturb the grass by unnecessary trampling, I walked around it while considering the problem in all its aspects. If I hid in that grass, I would have to keep a careful watch in two opposite directions: over the victim's remains and also in the direction by which the man-eater might be expected to make his approach, which would almost certainly be through this patch of grass. This I could not do; I would have at least to turn my head from side to side, even though I kept my body still. That would mean movement, and movement of any sort would be fatal.

One of two things would happen if the tiger became aware of me: he might take fright and disappear, or he would deliberately stalk and leap upon me before I even suspected his presence. Frankly, I funked that terrible alternative.

At this point, Yega came up with a brilliant idea. He and I would sit back to back in the grass, one of us watching the bamboo cutter's remains while the other listened for the rustle that would herald the man-eater's entrance into that same clump of grass, by which time he would not be more than five or six feet away.

What transpired next would have a lot to do with whether I happened to be the one who was watching the victim's remains or the tiger's approach through the grass. If I were watching the remains and Yega the grass, he would have to warn me with a nudge, and I would have to turn around in a second to be in time to shoot. And I would have to shoot accurately. But if I chose to watch the approach through the grass and left Yega to watch over the kill, and the man-eater crept up to the latter from some other direction, I would have to react similarly, except that the situation would not be nearly so dangerous. At least, the tiger would be more than a mere five or six feet away and I should have a better chance to shoot.

I hated to risk Yega's life. And I hated to risk my own. But this was our only chance and I nodded assent.

Strangely enough, in the Wynaad Forest area vultures are not nearly so numerous as in drier jungles of south India. Nevertheless, we took no chances of them discovering the remains and finishing what little flesh remained on the bones. So Yega cut a few small branches from the tree that grew eighty yards away, and these we placed over the bones and entrails of the man to hide them from any chance vulture hovering in the sky above. Then we returned to the deserted encampment.

It took another fifteen minutes for Timayya to come back in the car from Manantoddy. I told him of our discovery and our plan of action. Then occurred one of those awkward situations that sometimes appear between friends. Timayya stated bluntly that he would sit with me in Yega's stead, armed with my spare rifle, but I was not happy about his decision. I did not wish to risk my friend's life for one thing.

Secondly, quite frankly and I suppose selfishly, considering my own life was also at stake, I doubted his ability to keep watch for the tiger as efficiently as Yega would, with his lifetime of jungle experience. As tactfully as possible I put these points to my friend. Timmy became angry—and rude, too.

'Damn it, I'm a planter,' he said, 'not a bloody town-dweller like you. What the hell do you think? If you don't feel like sitting with me, at least lend me the 405/400 and . . . off back to Manantoddy yourself. I'll do the rest.'

There was a very nasty look in his eye.

I shrugged. 'Okay Timmy, you win,' I said. 'We'll sit together.'

The nasty look faded and a gleam of pleasure and excitement took its place.

When Yega heard the change of plan he was crestfallen. Now it was his turn to look at me reproachfully. I avoided his glance and studied one of the Studebaker's tyres closely.

We returned to Manantoddy for lunch, bringing Yega with us, after which we put in a couple of hours sleep to fortify us for the long, sleepless night vigil ahead. At three o'clock we were ready. Timmy suggested we take tea and sandwiches along with us, to which I assented after reminding him that these refreshments could only be enjoyed the following morning. No sound or movements of the slightest kind could we risk while we awaited the man-eater's return.

We left Yega at Manantoddy, as it would be dangerous for him to accompany us to the spot where we were going to sit and then return alone. Besides, we did not require his services in any way. By half-past three we had reached the woodcutter's deserted encampment. Here we parked the Studebaker close to the huts and before four we were at the patch of tiger-grass.

I removed the small branches with which Yega and I had earlier covered the scattered remains of the bamboo cutter to protect them from vultures, carrying them to a spot quite a distance away. It was a hot and sunny afternoon and what remained of the woodcutter, little enough though it was, had begun to smell, especially the entrails, which the man-eater had dragged to one side. But we dared not remove them for fear of arousing the tiger's suspicions when he returned.

I had already made it a condition with Timmy that I would face

the side from which the tiger might be expected to approach through the grass, while he would face in the opposite direction towards the woodcutter's remains. Fortunately, he had not been difficult about this and had acquiesced readily enough. We had brought two of the foam-rubber cushions from the Rest House to sit upon. They would not only provide comfort, but would deaden any sound we might make in movement. Placing these on the ground, we squatted on them back to back and facing in the directions already described. I crossed my legs and settled down to sit in silence, having trained myself to this position after many years of similar experience in the jungle. Timmy whispered that he could not make himself comfortable that way and stretched both his legs out before him. Straightaway a disquieting thought entered my mind: for how long would Timmy be able to sit thus without moving? To me it appeared physically impossible, and I knew he would become fidgety before sundown.

Jungle life in the forests of the Wynaad and the Western Ghats is rather different from that of the drier areas. Animals and reptiles are fewer in number, but bird and insect life is prolific. We quickly became aware of this, for within a few minutes of our arrival and things quietening down, we heard the twittering calls of birds from all directions, accompanied by the chirping of crickets. The cicada of these regions is different from those of the plains: the latter, to which I was accustomed, emits a shrill and continuous high note, but the hill variety, which abounded here, emits a rasping note of fluctuating volume. It almost dies away and then rises to a cadence that jars the nerves, before fading away, only to rise again.

As evening fell, distant junglecocks and spurfowl began to vie with one another in their usual preroosting chorus, to the accompaniment of an occasional, plaintive, brassy cry from a peacock, feeding amidst the fallen seeds of the giant bamboo that grew so prolifically, or grubbing for caterpillars by scratching up the thick carpet of decaying leaves and mould. Around us, from the grass itself came the very faint and indefinable sounds of insects of all kinds on the move: grasshoppers, beetles of countless varieties, and a host of other creatures. A green and slender mantis, that must have been at least eight inches long, appeared just before me, camouflaged so marvellously that I would not have noticed him had he not climbed upon my knee. His body was frail and indefinably delicate, for all the world like a sliver of bamboo and not more than a sixteenth of an inch in thickness, while his wings, of a transparent tissue and veined like leaves, folded across his back to resemble a green sepal of no consequence whatever. So wonderful and impartial is nature's camouflage, that both those that prey upon others by habit, and those that seek to escape from being preyed upon, are equally disguised

from one another. This inoffensive-looking mantis, that resembled so closely a slender twig with two green leaves attached, was quite as carnivorous and fierce in its own insect world as the man-eating tiger, whose return we were awaiting, was to the frightened jungle-dwellers.

Darkness came swiftly with the almost instant hushing of the bird-calls. The rustle of activity from the hidden insects in the grass around us increased apace. We felt their movements on all sides, and even upon our bodies. They climbed all over us and got inside our clothing, setting up such an itching that all our self-control was needed to prevent us from moving and scratching ourselves to secure an instant's relief.

I missed my old friends of the jungles of the plains, the nightjars, and thought of them for a few moments. They would be active at this period of twilight, flitting around in their silent, ghost-like fashion, in search of their evening meal, stragglers among the insects of the day that were going to bed late, and early-comers among the insects of the night in search of food.

This diverted my thoughts to the primal instincts of life, the search for food and the urge to procreate that are the two issues that govern all the dwellers of the jungle; to man and his civilization, and the search for wealth, which brings food and power, pleasures and a means of satisfying ourselves in practically any way we desire; and to much similar musing, one idea leading to another. But eventually I pulled myself up with quite a start, discovering that it was now pitch-dark and I had forgotten all about the man-eater and how close to me he might be.

The stench that came to us from the human fragments that had been exposed to the hot sun all day was now quite awful. Myriads of bluebottle flies had settled on them for the night.

The humble bluebottle fly is regarded everywhere as an obnoxious insect, associated only with filth and dirt and carrion. Nevertheless, he can be a great and secret friend to the hunter who watches by night; for the flies in their thousands, when they cover a carcase at night, are alert though resting. Any creature approaching near enough, even if it does not touch the carcase, makes its presence felt to the watchful, restless flies, who rustle in unison. And that rustling can be clearly heard by the watcher in the darkness, provided he is not too far away, is alert enough, has reasonably good hearing, and above all recognizes its significance. The bluebottles were silent now and I was satisfied that neither the tiger, nor anything else for that matter, was anywhere near the carcase.

My friend's back rested against mine tautly, uncomfortably, radiating heat though my sweater. I could sense his nervousness as he strained his eyes into the darkness. This is the most dangerous period

for the hunter who risks his life sitting on the ground for a man-eater : the brief fifteen to thirty minutes from twilight till the light of the stars makes itself felt, be it ever so little.

Our greatest danger lay in the direction in which I was facing, the opposite end of the grassy clump in the midst of which we were hiding. If the man-eater approached from there, his keen eyesight, even in that darkness, would enable him to discover our presence while he was yet some distance away. He would not bother to come any closer then. What he would do would depend upon his individual character; he might launch himself from fifteen feet away and be upon us in the fraction of a second, or, if he were a coward, as many man-eaters are, he would just slink noiselessly away.

Then I remembered with considerable trepidation that this tiger could not possibly be called a coward. Barely a few hours ago he had sneaked up to a hut filled with people and dragged a human being away. With tensed nerves and strained ears, I listened for the faintest creak or rustle of grass that might betray the arrival of the man-eater from in front, while hearkening for the buzz of disturbed bluebottles that might herald his advent from behind. There was nothing but complete silence. The immediate danger passed as three things happened almost together. My eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom and I could begin to identify objects around me. The stars came out in their multitude and their gleam seemed to bring back the moments of half-light that had so recently gone. And above all, the fireflies of the Wynaad began their nightly display of living fireworks that would continue till the early hours of the morning, when the mist and the dew would chill the tiny lamp-bearers and force them to seek the shelter of the foliage.

There must have been thousands upon thousands of these little creatures within a few yards of us, winging their way hither and thither in restless flight. The glow of their combined light produced a radiation that dispelled the darkness like a flashlight, then broke again into myriads of individual lights that sparkled through the darkness.

No sounds broke the stillness. The forest seemed strangely devoid of animal life. No friendly calls of sambar or spotted deer could we hear. No cries of the usual birds of the night. There came to us only the undefinable faint movements of the insects in the grass around us. And to the torment caused by the insect marauders on our bodies, the mosquitoes now began to add their torture. They had not worried us unduly until now, perhaps because they had not discovered our presence; but having done so they apparently decided to make the most of their discovery. I did not dare to betray our presence to the tiger which, at that very instant perhaps, might be approaching us. Faintly I could hear Timmy behind me, trying to blow the mosquitoes

away.

It was at this instant that there came clearly to my hearing the faint rustling buzz of angry, disturbed bluebottles flies. Something was near the remains of the woodsman. Timmy had heard it too, for I felt him tauten against my back, while he ceased blowing at the mosquitoes. His elbows dug into me in the prearranged signal and remained there as he gripped the 450/400 in his lap.

The flies buzzed again as they rose nervously a few inches above the bones and entrails on which they had been resting. They hummed a while, they resettled themselves and the buzzing stopped. The intruder, whatever it was, had not yet reached the kill or the flies would never have resettled. It was approaching.

Something made the faintest sound from beyond the remains and there came the distant thud of a stone being turned over. Undoubtedly the man-eater had arrived. He was reconnoitring and would presently approach the remains of his feast.

Or was he creeping upon us?

Casting caution to the winds I whisked around, bringing the Winchester to my shoulder and pressing the torch-button, fitted to the barrel, with my left thumb, almost in one movement. The bright beam cut a swathe of light through the blackness and was reflected by two baleful eyes. But they were rather more reddish-white in colour than a brilliant whitish-red. And they were set rather too closely together.

Sitting on his haunches like a dog, the torchlight caught the panther in the act of licking his lips. We could see the red of his tongue sweep across the slightly opened mouth.

Could the man-eater be a panther after all? I dismissed the thought as soon as it crossed my mind, for I had seen the man-eater's pug-marks on the trail we had followed. They had certainly been those of a tiger. Besides, he had been seen by Yega and some of the other woodcutters. This panther was merely there by chance. In passing by, he had stumbled on the kill. He was sitting there in doubt, wondering how it had all come about and if he could take a chance.

At that moment the panther became aware of the torch-beam that was shining straight into his eyes.

He stood up, snarled, turned and walked away. Disgust was written in his every movement. Clearly he did not wish to involve himself in such a compromising situation. I extinguished the torch as quickly as possible. Was the man-eater nearby? If so, he would certainly have seen my light. That might cause him to run away. Or, having come to know of our presence and whereabouts, he might at that very moment be creeping upon us. But the attitude of the panther soon dispelled this disquietening thought. He seemed absolutely unconcerned. He would hardly be so indifferent if his hereditary and

implacable foe, a tiger, were in the vicinity.

The bluebottles settled down and so did we, to a long and uneventful vigil, while the fireflies kept us company to lend enhantment to an otherwise macabre scene. It became cold, and then colder. The insects in the grass around us stopped their restless movements. Perhaps they were feeling the cold too. The mosquitoes grew less active as well and the fireflies began to disappear.

The tiger should have returned long ago. He should have put in an appearance even before the panther. It seemed as if the man-eater did not intend to come back.

Time dragged on. I began to feel sleepy and perhaps I grew a bit careless too. For, although I heard the sound once or twice, it did not register straight away. Then, all of a sudden, I was wide awake and alert.

Something had approached the grass in which we were hiding. Not directly from in front but a little to my left. There had been a faint rustle and then a definite footfall as something heavy had placed its weight upon the grass. There had followed a faint but distinct creaking and cracking of stems.

And that thing, whatever it was, had now stopped.

Had the man-eater discovered our presence, as he must most surely have done? Was he crouching for a final spring? The answer came the very next second when the tiger snarled. He was not more than ten feet away.

I pressed the button of the torch.

The beam lit up a wild scene of violently swaying grass stems. I had a glimpse of something brown that catapulted itself backwards and was gone. Then came a shattering roar from the jungle.

I switched off the torch as the man-eater began to demonstrate by emitting roar after roar. He was very angry; but he was also frightened. I had switched on the torch a fraction too soon. He would otherwise have come on. Perhaps I had done the right thing after all. I might have been too late to stop his charge, once it had been launched.

Timmaya had whisked around and, like me, was facing in the direction from which the tiger was now roaring. The beast began to circle us, snarling and roaring horribly as he did so. It was a war of nerves. Either he was trying to work up enough courage to drive home a charge, or he was trying to scare us away. I felt he was following the second plan.

We waited awhile, hoping he would decide to attack; but this he failed to do. The roars now sank to a series of growls, but they came from different directions as the tiger circled. It seemed he was trying to find out how many human beings were hidden in that grass. Was

there only one, whom he could easily overwhelm, or were there many?

This went on for another fifteen minutes. But nothing happened. The tiger would not attack, nor did he go away. It was a game of nerves and I am afraid the tiger won.

I decided to draw him out by precipitating an attack. I whispered to Timmaya to remain where he was, while I got up and started to walk back towards the encampment, which was only a short distance away. The tiger would probably come after me. On the other hand, he might decide that it would be a better proposition to let the hated man-with-the-light depart while he went back for what was left of the kill. This would give Timmy the chance of a shot.

My friend protested vigorously, whispering 'Don't be a fool!'

But, with restraining hand on his shoulder, I got slowly to my feet, stood there a few seconds to restore my circulation, and then started walking deliberately towards the woodcutter's deserted huts, taking care to make the expected amount of sound a man might make in covering such ground.

The effect on the man-eater was instantaneous. He began to roar again; and then he came after me. You must bear in mind that, except for the starlight, it was quite dark. Purposely, I had kept the torch extinguished so as not to frighten the tiger, but the situation had turned into a most unpleasant one.

I had covered about twenty-five yards when the man-eater screwed up enough courage to charge. I remember thinking to myself that it was fortunate he had chosen to be so noisy about it, rather than make a silent and stealthy rush, when I would not have known from which direction he was coming.

There came the all-too-familiar 'Wroof! Wroof! Wroof! as he launched his attack. I whirled around with the rifle to my shoulder, once again pressing the button of the torch with my left thumb. The bright beam of light cut through the darkness to shine upon the angry eyes of the enraged man-eater, coming towards me in an up-and-down motion as he charged.

It was difficult to hold the eyes in my sights as they moved, and while this thought flashed through my mind, something quite unexpected happened. I was blinded by another blaze of light that obscured the tiger, and indeed everything else from sight, as it shone fully into my eyes! Timmaya had switched on his torch and was shinning it directly in my face.

Instinctively, I raised my forearm to cover my eyes and jumped backwards to try to get out of the glare.

The next instant everything was plunged into inky darkness. My finger went off the button and my own torch went out while the beam

of light from my friend's torch turned away from me.

It cut through the darkness and on to the tiger, which was crouched on the ground hardly four feet away from me in a ludicrous pose. He looked rather foolish with his head bent low, almost to ground level, front paws outstretched, with his rear up in the air behind him, his curving tail upheld and stiff, brought to a halt by Timmy's light.

It was not an instant too soon, for he had been about to spring upon me when Timmy's unexpected light from behind stopped him.

There came an ear-splitting crash and I saw the crouching tiger literally pushed as if by some invisible force, when the bullet from my. 450/400 rifle, fired by Timmy, took him somewhere in the side.

At that instant I stood directly in his *path*, his nearest enemy, and he came for me with all the hate and speed of which he as capable. My own torch-beam must have completely blinded him when I fired directly into his open mouth, followed by a second shot as he crashed at my feet while I jumped aside.

That was when Timmy fired again. His bullet passed over the tiger and hit the ground almost at my feet, raising a spurt of dust. Everything was over when I found myself running backwards at incredible speed to try to get away from the tiger as he rolled on the ground.

It was Timmy who got the man-eater, for apart from his first shot that had struck the tiger's flank and halted the beast at the instant of springing upon me, he had fired a second which had entered the animal squarely behind the left shoulder. This second shot I had never heard in the confusion. My own bullet had blown out the back of the tiger's head, while my second, also striking his head, had struck the ground near me and had been a complete miss.

Timmy was overwhelmed with delight and executed a war dance around the fallen enemy. Although the skin, and particularly the head, would not make much of a trophy, ruined as they were by the bullets from my two powerful rifles, he kept chanting and repeating over and over again that he had never heard of a man-eater being killed under such unusual conditions.

Needless to say although I was not nearly so exuberant, I fully concurred with Timmy's sentiments. I might not object to having the same experience all over again providing I could be in Timmy's place. But not where I had been!

Six

The Man-Hater of Talainovu

IN THE KOLLEGAL TALUK OF WHAT WAS FORMERLY COIMBATORE district, part of the Madras Presidency in the days when the British governed India, there is a hamlet called Talainovu. Now the British have gone and with them the Madras Presidency, and Madras state has taken its place; its area is just about half that was covered by the former presidency, for much of the territory has gone to the neighbouring states of Andhra, Mysore and Kerala.

Among these transferred territories is Kollegal taluk, and with it the hamlet of Talainovu. They have now become a part of Mysore state. Cultivation and buildings have spread, and much of the beautiful forest areas that stretched from Talainovu across rugged hills down to the valley of the Cauvery river have been felled ruthlessly, while what is left has been practically denuded of game.

But it will always be easy for me to remember the little village of Talainovu, as I knew it long ago, for two reasons. Firstly, in the Tamil language the word 'talainovu' means 'headache'; secondly, the wily panther that made its abode by the banks of the Cauvery river, in a steep valley some ten miles from the hamlet, gave me a real headache while trying to deal with it.

Man-eating panthers are rare in southern India and have always been so. This panther was never a man-eater in the true sense. Rather, it was a man-hater, filled with deep hostility for the human race, and it treasured this hatred and exacted a toll upon its lifelong enemy until

its last day.

To begin at the beginning; a pantheress lived on a forest hilltop, ten miles from the village of Talainovu to the south. Six furlongs away and to the north, lay a deep valley where the hill fell away steeply to the bed of the Cauvery river. To the east the forest stretched for miles upon miles, into and across the boundaries of the Salem district and along the twists and turns of the Cauvery river. But to the west it continued only for about six miles, till it gave way to the low scrub that bordered the main road leading from the town of Kollegal, across a bridge, northwards to Maddur and Bangalore.

This pantheress was a young animal, and when she gave birth to her first cubs, three in number, she was a proud and happy mother, devoted to her offspring and prepared to defend them with her life. According to reports and hearsay, picked up by me at a much later date, some circumstances, we do not know what, induced the pantheress to bring her cubs out of the cave in which they were born much earlier than normal, while they were still too young to move about in safety. Perhaps their father had had designs on their young lives and sought to devour them, as male tigers and panthers frequently do. Perhaps a bear trespassed into their cave. Perhaps food was scarce in that locality.

So the pantheress brought her cubs down the hill and hid them in a bamboo thicket on the banks of the Cauvery river. No doubt this was only a temporary measure till the mother could find a better home for them, perhaps some other cave. But fate decided to be unkind to her that early morning. She had left the cubs in the thicket and had probably been out hunting all the night. The sun had topped the parallel range of hills that marked the course of the big river and was glinting on its tumbling, foaming waters when the pantheress was yet a mile away from the bamboos in which she had concealed her cubs.

And then she stopped in her tracks, for far away she heard a noise, a persistent tap-tap-tap! Humans! And in the very area where she had left her three little cubs unprotected.

The pantheress doubtless broke into a bounding gallop to cover the intervening distance as fast as she could, her only thought for the safety of her offspring. But when she was but a short distance away she must have heard their snarls, and she knew what had happened. The hated humans had discovered her cubs.

The pantheress arrived on the scene to find that half-a-dozen or more almost naked black bodies, glistening with sweat, surrounded her cubs. These were on the ground, back to back, and small as they were they snarled defiance at the intruders. The men jabbered to one another, pointing at the cubs with the sharp, curved knives that they used for cutting the bamboos, an expression of gloating excitement on

each countenance, but no sign of pleasure at the three pretty balls of fur that so gamely defied them, nor pity for their helplessness.

Even as she watched, one of the bamboos cutters raised his *koithar* and swiped at the nearest cub. The curved blade bit into the soft body. The cub was flung into the air and fell some feet away, almost cut in two but still living. It groaned faintly as its young blood reddened the grass.

This was the signal for the other bamboo cutters to destroy the remaining two cubs, which they set about doing without further delay. A few slashes of their sharp knives and it was all over. Three mangled scraps of flesh now lay scattered on the ground where previously there had been three living creatures.

Probably an inborn fear of the human to all wild animals, even the worst man-eating tiger and the most ferocious rogue elephant, had held the grief-stricken mother back, but the sight of her dead cubs now drove her crazy. With short, sharp roars, she hurled herself upon the men.

The first man did not know what it was all about for the pantheress tore out his eyes as her raking talons slammed into his face. He fell to the ground, and she leaped over him to bite the second man's chest. He fell, too, his screams joining those of the blinded man who thrashed about on the ground. The remainder, all armed with *koithars*, did not wait. With yells of terror they fled in all directions.

The pantheress made to follow them but then stopped, her attention taken by the two men who writhed upon the ground. With cold fury she set upon the two of them and tore them to shreds.

Then, sniffing at the dead bodies of her three cubs, she picked up the least mangled of them and bore it away in sorrow.

That was how it all began.

When the bamboo cutters returned to their village, they had a harrowing tale to tell of a savage panther of huge dimensions that had attacked them entirely without provocation. They did not mention their part in the incident—at least, not them—and of how they had wantonly destroyed the cubs and infuriated the mother. This admission came later. Naturally, there was a hue and cry. People avoided that part of the jungle where the killings had taken place, or such as had to go there went armed with hatchets and guns, and in groups of as many persons as possible.

The pantheress was not seen or heard of for some weeks after that. People soon forgot the incident, and through apathy or laziness left their weapons behind. The licensed cutters of bamboo and sellers of timber, as well as the poachers, went into the jungle, the former by day to follow their daily routine, and the latter, who lived by stealing and selling the same commodities, renewed their practice of cutting

bamboos and wood and floating the stolen material across the river during the bright moonlit nights.

But the vengeful pantheress did not forget. This was her opportunity to strike a second time.

A notorious poacher of sandalwood, whom the people of the forest department and the police knew had been operating for years, but whom they had never succeeded in bringing to book, went into the jungle with his son one moonlit night. They had planned to cut some sandalwood, float it down the river for a mile or so to a spot where the water became calm and there was no undercurrent, and then tow the cut timber across the river to the northern bank which belonged to Mysore state, using the circular coracle made of bamboo and buffalo hide which they kept permanently hidden on the river for this purpose. Once they were on the Mysore side of the river, they knew they would be safe from pursuit by the authorities on the Madras bank and would be asked no awkward questions.

The two thieves began hacking the sandalwood saplings, they had marked for this purpose on an earlier visit, and the pantheress heard the hated sound of chopping. As likely as not the noise of wood being cut reminded her, by instinctive association rather than thought, of the day when her cubs had been cut to pieces before her eyes. Hatred must have filled her mind as she started stalking towards the noise with but one thought in her brain—to obliterate those who made it.

The father never knew what happened when the pantheress sprang upon him from behind and fastened her fangs in his throat. He could not even scream for help, but toppled to the ground with the sudden weight upon his back. The son, a lad of eighteen years, saw what was happening, but with thoughts only for his own safety and not for his father's life, dropped his axe and fled precipitately.

It took the pantheress a few seconds to kill the man and that saved the boy from sharing the same fate. Running as fast as he could, he reached the coracle, jumped into it and paddled frantically across the river. When he got back to his hut and burst in upon his mother, it was to tell what had just happened to his father.

The villagers had gone to sleep long ago, but the combined wails of mother and son awoke them. They lit their lights and heard the story, but agreed not to do anything till the next day. After all, everybody knew both father and son were thieves.

The sun was high when a large party of villagers, armed with guns, hatchets, knives and spears and led by the poacher's son, returned to the scene. There they found the old thief lying in a pool of his own blood, his gullet torn out and his whole body badly bitten and lacerated. But it was very noticeable that no flesh had been eaten. The killer could certainly not be called a man-eater. To the men who gazed

with horror upon the mangled remains, the attack on the poacher had apparently been for no reason and under no provocation whatever, for at that time few people knew the beginning of the story.

Once again there was an uproar and folk went about only in groups and armed to the teeth. The panic lasted for a longer period on this occasion, but once more time and the usual apathy among the people gradually calmed them down. Eventually, the panther was forgotten again and they carried on in their accustomed ways.

Again weeks passed, and again came the moonlit nights, the period when most of the mischief is done in the jungles of India. For it is during this time that the poachers of game sit over water holes and salt licks to shoot the sambar, spotted deer and other animals that come there to quench their thirst or eagerly to lick the salty earth, while the timber thieves, who steal the sandalwood, teakwood, *muthee*, giant bamboo etc., go into the forest to hack down the trees, cut them to convenient lengths and float the timber down the river or take it stealthily away in bullock carts or, when they are daring enough, by lorry loads.

A third kind of thief also takes advantage of the bright moonlight: the poachers of fish. They do not fish with rods or nets, for the catch would be too small and the work too hard and slow. Instead, in the river pools where they know the large fish congregate at nights to sleep or to feed, according to species, these men explode their home-made bombs, made in secrecy from crude gunpowder and fuses. Floating gently downstream in one of the circular coracles made of a bamboo frame covered with buffalo hide, in common use on the rivers of India, these prowlers visit every pool for a distance of about five miles down the river. The fuse is lit and the bomb is then floated on the water.

While the explosion does no general damage, the concussion in the water stuns the large fish and slaughters thousands of the smaller ones and all the fry for yards around. These casualties rise to the surface, where the larger fish are quickly scooped into the coracle with the help of nets attached to poles. The thousands of smaller dead fish, including the fry, are allowed to go to waste and float downstream to rot and be eaten by other fish and by the crocodiles.

And so the operation is repeated from pool to pool. By this time the poachers have gathered almost more fish into the coracle than it can hold, while the wanton destruction of countless thousands of valuable fry and many species of small fish can be imagined.

Generally a number of men share in the operation, employing two coracles, one from which to launch the bombs, and the other for collecting the catch. The second is often almost at sinking point before the poachers feel they have collected enough. Moreover, there is an

unwritten law amongst them that they should not trespass upon the domain of the next batch of poachers, which starts where they leave off, for that would provoke a fight and one or other batch would be bound to sneak to the forest department officials or to the police. Everyone is happy, the fish are slaughtered, and the local authorities can do nothing about it. Moreover, to make things absolutely safe, each man receives a basketful after every expedition. Should they prove unlucky and they are discovered by some representative of the law, the poachers have but to present half-a-dozen of the largest fish they have caught to the official and all is well again.

The coracle, loaded with fish, is eventually brought ashore at the end of the five-mile stretch. Here the catch is cleaned and gutted and loaded into gunny sacks that the men have brought with them. Every man shoulders a bag, while two men pick up the coracles and carry them upside down over their shoulders. The light flat paddles are taken by one of the others. Now begins the five-mile walk back to the point from which they started, for it is not possible to propel the clumsy, circular craft upstream against the strong river currents. This is the hardest part of the whole business.

The same procedure is followed through the ensuing moonlit nights until the dark nights come again, when the poachers rest and laze it out for a fortnight till moonlight returns.

In very lonely regions where there are no forest guards or other inconvenient persons to interfere, the bombing of the pools is carried on by daylight, although at the period I am writing about there was some restraint, for the forest departments were controlled by British officers. Alas, that restraint has now gone. With Independence, the poachers no longer work by night.

But to return to our story: the moonlit nights came round again and a party of fish poachers systematically bombed pool after pool and netted the stunned fish, filling them into the second coracle, which was propelled by a single man so as to leave more space. They worked steadily until after midnight, when they decided to take time off to go ashore and eat the snacks they had brought with them.

It so happened that the second coracle, the one filled with the catch and paddled by the single boatman, was nearer the shore when his companions called to him:

'Brother, put ashore. We have worked hard and we've caught much. Let's rest for a while and eat the *shappad* (food) we have brought with us and drink some cold coffee.'

The solitary boatman welcomed the call, for he was lonely. He dug the blade of his paddle into the water, holding the shaft with both hands, first to the right of him and then to the left, with swift, short strokes, to force the clumsy craft across the current which was

particularly strong at this place, for not long had passed since the rains had filled the river to overflowing.

Eventually he reached the bank and sprang ashore, carrying in one hand the end of the rope that was attached to the bamboo bottom of the coracle, so as to tie it to the root or trunk of a tree. This he never succeeded in doing. Those of his companions in the other coracle who happened to be watching saw something that looked long and grey spring from behind the *mendhi* (henna) bushes at the water's edge. They heard a rasping roar and saw the black form of their friend go down with a strange grey shape on top of it. They heard his piercing scream and then saw that his coracle, dragging the rope that had fallen from his hands, was rushing downstream on the powerful current.

The boatman who was paddling their craft made a desperate effort to. overtake the runaway coracle. But he was at a disadvantage with the load of men in his own boat. The runaway coracle gained speed as the current, spinning it around and around, drew it towards midstream where the water bubbled and foamed in the bright moonlight over a low cataract formed by a reef of rocks.

The pursuing boatman was almost rash enough to drive his craft into those dangerous waters when his companions restrained him. They watched in dismay as the unmanned coracle lurched heavily against the rocks, tossed wildly from side to side and then capsized, throwing the whole of their catch into the river. Then it was that they turned towards the shore to abuse and beat their comrade for being so stupid as to let the rope slip from his grasp. Why, a large coracle such as the one they had just lost would cost a hundred rupees to make and much more to buy, not to mention the value of the fish that had been lost in the river. Idiot that he was they would thrash him soundly!

But on the bank no one was to be seen. Then they remembered the grey shape in the moonlight, and the roaring they had heard, and how their friend seemed to stumble and fall. They had been so concerned to intercept the runaway coracle that they had ignored their companion's plight.

Some of the men ordered the boatman who wanted to go ashore to investigate, not to do so on any account. Perhaps some evil spirit was lurking there. It had got their friend and might get all of them if they ventured too near. For quite a long time nobody thought of the panther. Then somebody remembered, and reminded the rest. They agreed then that the grey form they had seen had been the lurking beast. It had killed their companion and assuredly was devouring him at that moment.

Using the single paddle, the men took turns to propel their weighted craft upstream, as they dared not go ashore. They did this

for about half a mile and then found they could go no further. So they made for the river bank, where each man exhorted the other to jump ashore first. Finally they did so in a body, relying on the safety of numbers. So as not to be encumbered by the weighty coracle all the way back to their starting point, they drew it some yards up the bank and made for their village as fast as they could in a group, talking at the top of their voices to keep the panther away.

Next day, when the sun was high, the whole village turned out, the men having armed themselves as best as they could, to discover what had happened to the missing man. They found his remains behind the henna bushes. He had been literally torn to bits, but so far as could be seen, none of his flesh had been eaten.

And so it went on, the pantheress attacking and killing where she could, but never eating her victims. Her handiwork was evident by the manner in which each corpse was bitten and clawed savagely, far beyond what was necessary just to kill the victim. She seemed to be taking savage delight in mangling each body almost beyond recognition.

Now, the stretch of river where these events took place was a favourite spot for catching the great *mahseer*, the king of Indian fishes, in spite of all the poaching. But fishing has never held any attraction for me. I have no patience for it. Yet a great many of my friends are devotees and occasionally I took one or other of them to this river for a couple of days.

These visits had to be few and far between, however, because the rough track from Talainovu, through the jungle to the river, is very steep, with abrupt turns that my Studebaker cannot negotiate. Most of my friends owned English cars, and these were equally unsuitable for the purpose. So our visits were limited to those occasions when we could get someone who owned a jeep to come along with us, or to the lucky occasions when we could borrow or hire such a vehicle.

Well, such an opportunity came our way one day, and this time it seemed to have come to stay. Donald, my son, had bought a jeep! A much-battered vehicle that hailed from Andhra state, painted vivid blue, and with faults in every conceivable part. But Don set to work, and at considerable expense and very great trouble he substituted good parts for bad, so that eventually we possessed a vehicle that would go anywhere.

Then came the day when we set out for the Talainovu fishing grounds, with Donald proudly driving the jeep he had so painstakingly repaired. Next to him sat Tiny' Seddon, a great 'mahseer' fisherman, great not only in his fishing potentialities but also in bulk and height. In the back were three of us; an old friend and schoolmate of Donald's, named Merwan Chamar-Baughvala; Thangavelu, who had once been

my *shikari* and had found service in our establishment as table-boy, motor-cleaner, the feeder of our domestic creatures and many wild-animal pets, and general jack-of-all-trades, his particular function on this trip being camp cook. Finally, wedged securely and tightly, at an uncomfortable angle that gave little chance to move, was myself.

It is exactly ninety-nine miles from our house in Bangalore to the camping site on the bank of the Cauvery river, some ten miles beyond the village of Talainovu, where we proposed to do our fishing. We left Bangalore rather late, and when the journey ended the sun was setting in flames of red, with a background of orange, vermilion and indigo. We halted a few yards from the river's edge, under the grove of giant *muthee*, tamarind and *jumlum* trees, beneath which we always made our camp.

There were three things to be done at once, and the trained members of the party—Don, Thangavelu and myself—started on them straightaway. Don looked quickly around for fresh elephant tracks, to reassure ourselves that none were in the vicinity to resent our intrusion and come thundering down upon us. Using both feet, I started clearing the ground, in a six or seven yard circle, of all dried leaves, stones and sticks which might shelter scorpions, particularly the small red variety. A sting from such a scorpion is guaranteed to take your mind off all other problems, including the demands of the Income Tax *wallahs*, for the next eight hours or more. Thangavelu hurried to gather dry logs, a task in which Don soon began to help him, for the camp fire that was to be kept blazing all night in case an elephant came our way while we were asleep.

Tiny Seddon jumped on to a rock half-submerged in the water and gazed pensively at the swirling eddies. No doubt he was seeking inspiration as to where to start fishing the next morning. Merwan Chamar-Baughvala threw himself on the ground I had just cleared and remarked how comfortable it was compared with the jeep.

None of us thought of the panther—because up to this moment none of us knew about it!

The moon would not rise till late. We ate Merwan's contribution of chicken biriyani and pork vindaloo, two very delicious but over-rich dishes, and while Thangavelu was preparing the tea, drank water from the rivet. That is, all of us except Tiny, who was certain the river water contained cholera germs, typhoid germs, and bacteria of every variety. He said he would wait for the tea. Then Thangavelu stroked the camp fire that was to burn all night and we lay back and smoked and told stories, gazing at the starry sky beyond the canopy of leaves above our heads. We counted ourselves fortunate to be able to enjoy such bliss, which so many of our fellow creatures, crowded in stuffy cities all over the world, have never experienced for even a day in all

their monotonous lives. And so we fell asleep.

I do not know why it was that I awoke with a start. My watch showed a few minutes past three. The camp fire had died down to a few glowing embers, for Thangavelu, who had undertaken to keep it alive, had long since fallen asleep. Donald, to my left, was snoring loudly. Merwan and Tiny, in that order to my right, had covered their heads with their bedsheets to ward off mosquitoes and the dew, and were sleeping soundlessly.

I wondered what had wakened me so suddenly. Perhaps some jungle noise. Perhaps an elephant breaking branches in order to feed on the higher, more tender leaves. I listened more intently and for a time heard nothing except Don's noisy, rattling snores.

Then I knew what had wakened me, for close at hand I heard a guttural rasping sound: 'Haa-ah! Haa-ah! Haa-ah!' The call of a hungry panther!

Now panthers in the forest are, as a rule, quite harmless animals. Except when they turn man-eaters which is very rarely, or when they are wounded, they are shy, cowardly beasts that avoid the presence of man. No doubt the animal that was now calling, although apparently quite close, had not yet caught sight of the embers of our fire. As soon as it did so, in all probability it would hurry away as fast as it could. Or so I thought as I continued to listen sleepily to the sound.

The call came again, and louder. The hungry panther was certainly quite close. Surely, it must have seen our fire by now? I felt very sleepy indeed and comfortable. Drat the beast, I thought. Why doesn't it let me sleep?

That was when I heard the panther snarl! At last it has seen us, I thought; now it will vanish. But the panther snarled again, long and menacingly.

Strange, I thought, my eyes half-closed with sleep. It is either a very inquisitive or a very angry and daring panther. I mused; but why worry? I was safe in the centre of the party. Tiny was at one end, Don at the other, and Thangavelu by himself not far from the fire.

The panther growled again, low and long, and I sat up abruptly, groping for the torch I had kept near my pillow. Blinking to free myself from sleep, I directed the torch-beam towards the snarling that was growing louder.

It revealed a panther, crouching on the ground a few feet from Thangavelu and evidently preparing to spring upon him. There was no mistaking its posture: I could see its tail lashing to and fro, a sure indication of its malevolent intentions. I felt for my rifle, which I had kept loaded beside me on the ground.

And then Thangavelu ruined everything.

I suppose his jungle instinct was really responsible. It alerted him,

but rather late, to the great danger that threatened. He sat up abruptly, and in doing so kicked over the *degchie* containing the water he had boiled for Tiny to drink. Perhaps the clatter it made, or Thangavelu's movement, or more likely my torch-beam, convinced the panther that its presence had been discovered, and before I could do anything with the rifle, handicapped as I was with the torch in my right hand, the brute leaped aside and disappeared behind the nearest bush.

All this time Thangavelu had been blissfully unaware of any danger. Still half asleep, he had not heard or seen the panther. I awoke the others and told them what had happened.

They were surprised at first. Then Don said, 'Dad, you've had a nightmare. Merwan's chicken biriyani and pork vindaloo are the cause of it. I haven't heard a sound all night and I doubt if there's a panther within miles.'

The others laughed and I was a bit huffed. How could Don say he had not heard a sound when he had been snoring all night? I clambered to my feet, still holding the torch and rifle?

'Come and see this,' I invited, shining my torch on the ground and walking towards the spot where the panther had been lying. But the earth there was hard and nothing could be seen.

'See what' asked Don, sarcastically, while Merwan wailed, 'Why did you wake me up for nothing?'

They all went back to their places and fell asleep again, including Thangavelu. Nobody had believed me. But I knew that the danger that had threatened us, and particularly the servant, had been very real and not part of a dream or my imagination.

I rekindled the fire with the wood that Thangavelu had gathered the evening before. Then with my rifle and torch at hand, I remained awake for the rest of the night with my back propped against my bedroll. I was convinced the panther I had seen had been a man-eater and that Thangavelu had been saved in the nick of time. The calls that had awakened me showed that it was hungry. The chances were it might return.

An hour later a sambar started calling on the hillside half a mile away. It called for some time before the spotted deer scented or saw the source of the danger. Then they started calling too. Clearly the panther was retreating across the hillside.

By this time a crescent moon had arisen, outlining the immediate neighbourhood. The water in the river gurgled monotonously as it flowed over the rocks and I felt very sleepy. At last the dawn came, when Tiny was the first to awake. He saw me.

'Don't say you've been sitting up all night?' he asked.

'Wake Thangavelu and tell him to make some tea', was all the

reply I gave. Then I went to sleep before the water could boil.

Tiny fished all day. He caught a ten-pound *mahseer*, a couple of seven-pounders and some smaller fish. Don tried his hand, but like me he is impatient and caught nothing. Merwan said he wanted to have a bath, and so as not to disturb the fishing, started to wander downstream with his towel across his shoulders. I thought of the man-eater which no one believed I had seen; and called after him, 'Wait a minute, I'll join you.' Picking up my rifle and swinging a towel, I followed him.

That afternoon we all felt sleepy, particularly myself, and the camp was once again hushed in slumber. But not for long. We heard a series of hollow sounds drawing nearer gradually, 'Boomp! Boomp! Boomp!'

Poachers! They were bombing the river and operating in broad daylight, too, evidently without fear of being caught. Soon, around the bend in the river appeared the usual two coracles, the first loaded with men and the other with fish. Catching sight of our party, they paddled frantically against the current to try to reach the other side.

This move incited us to act though. Don fired a shot into the air. Then he called out, 'Come here, or the next shot will be at you.'

The paddling stopped and the two coracles started drifting downstream. It was evident the men inside were debating whether to surrender or make a dash for it. Then Merwan shouted in English, which of course they did not understand. 'Come here, you bastards, or as sure as eggs we'll sink you.'

Slowly the men started paddling the coracles towards us, but stopped when they were a few yards offshore. From our slightly elevated position on the bank, we could look down on the hundreds of fish lying in the second coracle.

Then began a harangue which was as needless as it was foolish. Don threatened and admonished them alternately, for their wrongful activity. The men replied that they saw nothing wrong in it. The fish belonged to nobody in particular. Then why should the government frame rules or demand fishing licences? And who were we to interfere? And so on, and so on.

Thangavelu, being about the wisest in our party at the time, said, 'Give us a couple of your best and largest fish. Then, go and blow yourselves up for all we care!'

In the midst of all this I asked, 'Look, is there a man-eating panther in these parts?'

There was a hushed silence. Then one of the men replied in a low tone, as if he did not wish to be overheard, 'Indeed, *dorai*, there is. It has killed many, many people. Only a few days ago it killed one of our own comrades, whose name was Balu. That's why we are now catching fish by daylight. Normally, we would only do this on moonlit

nights, but not a soul will stir out after sunset now.'

So I was right after all!

Don was excited. 'Come here. Come ashore,' he invited. 'Damn the fish. We'll not harm you. I want to know more about this panther. We're *shikaris*. We're interested and will try to shoot it.'

A chord having been established, the fishermen brought their coracles to the bank and tied them with ropes to the roots of trees. Then they stepped ashore and sat around us in a group. Don and I plied them with questions, and from their answers pieced together the story which I have already related. The men admitted the panther was not a man-eater in the strict sense. So far, it had not actually eaten any of its victims, but had contented itself with mauling and mutilating them hideously. Obviously the animal was female, possessed of unusual sagacity and with a quite abnormal memory, for most wild animals generally forget the past very quickly. This pantheress evidently remembered the slaying of her cubs and her feeling of hatred for the human race seemed as fresh now as on that day. After hearing the story, our sympathies were with the aggrieved animal.

Eventually the boatmen asked to take leave of us. The sun would grow hot and the fish could not be bombed so easily, for they would swim into deeper waters. Disgustedly, we told them to get the hell out of it, but not before Thangavelu had remembered to pick out two of the largest and best fish for us.

'So you see, chaps, I was not dreaming after all,' was my first comment as the two coracles began to draw away. Tiny was the only one to think any more about fishing that day. The rest of us, Thangavelu included, went into close conference as to how to shoot this panther. Don and Merwan were particularly keen. For myself, I was of the opinion that the panther had a case.

From the start, the others felt we had a difficult problem in not having a regular man-eater to deal with. Here I disagreed. In my opinion, given the time, this pantheress would be far easier to come to grips with, because, filled with hatred for humans, she would go out of her way to try and attack us. As I saw the situation, we should operate individually in trying to find her. That would give us four chances to one. Correspondingly, the pantheress would most certainly come for any one of us whom she might see alone, although, according to the fishermen, she had not hesitated to attack a whole group of persons. This plan appeared to me to offer a much greater chance of success than the one proposed by Thangavelu, which was to go to Talainovu in the jeep and purchase two young bulls or buffaloes as bait. For these would then have to be driven on foot to the camp site and suitable spots selected before they were tied out. All this I

knew would take considerable time and, as matters stood, there was far less chance of the panther attacking either of the baits than one of us.

Fortunately, Don had brought his .423 Mauser rifle along with his .12 bore shotgun, while I had my .405 and my .12 bore too. This made two rifles and two shotguns, enough to arm all four of us.

We decided to have an early lunch, after which Tiny, with my shotgun loaded with lethal shell, would walk downstream along the river bank for two hours or so, and then turn and come back. Merwan would do the same upstream, using Donald's gun. Don and I, armed with our rifles, would search the jungle separately and in different directions. Thangavelu would climb up a tree somewhere close by and await our return, while keeping an eye on the jeep and our camp kit which was lying scattered around. It was agreed that everyone should get back to camp by 5 p.m. at the latest.

We did this and, with parting admonitions to each other to keep a sharp lookout against surprise attack, scattered according to plan each hoping to be the lucky individual to come across the panther. I do not think any one of us quite realized till he was all alone that what he had set out to do, and was doing in fact, was to offer himself for the next four hours or more as a bait to a most dangerous wild animal that had all the advantages of ground and cover in its favour.

I had decided to go in the direction in which I had heard the sambar calling the previous night. Perhaps this led towards some cave and would afford a better chance of success than just roaming aimlessly in the jungle. A few minutes from the river I picked up a game-trail that led up the northeastern slope of the same hill down which the jeep had travelled from Talainovu. It was a well-defined track, used by sambar and other animals in coming to water at the river during the summer months, and recent marks of deer and bear revealed the presence of a fair amount of game, despite the comparative silence of the previous night.

The path wound diagonally uphill, skirting boulders and heavy cover at a safe distance, as game-trails made by the members of the deer family usually do, for fear of some carnivore lying in hiding behind a rock or bush. This was in my favour, although I knew that a panther was able to conceal itself behind cover of any sort. My thoughts were uneasy and after a while I became anxious about Don and our other two friends. I hoped they were being as careful as I was.

It was too late and too hot for the birds to be calling, and so I proceeded in uncomfortable silence, keeping a sharp lookout to right and left while studying every bit of cover in front of me before I drew abreast of it. The real danger lay from behind, as I knew, since panthers and nearly all tigers for that matter, even when they have

made a practice of attacking human beings, never completely lose their fear of man and in most cases spring upon their victims from behind.

And so I halted frequently to look behind me, trying to catch the least movement of leaf or blade of grass that might betray the pantheress as she prepared to pounce. As was to be expected, there were a number of false alarms. My searching eyes detected a twig shaking suspiciously, or a blade of grass springing suddenly upright from where it had been held down by the weight of some hidden presence. Sometimes I heard a rustle, or the distinct crack of a dried twig, often behind me and many times in other directions. Then I froze, half raised the .405, and stared intently towards the sound, expecting at any moment to see the spotted form come hurtling down upon me. Nothing happened. The rustling or the snapping of the twig was not repeated, and the forest remained uncannily silent. Or the twig that shook did so again, or the blade of grass continued to wave in the breeze. Then tension died within me, the hair at the back of my neck relaxed, and I realized there was nothing to fear. Thus I proceeded for some distance till some other movement frightened me once more.

This sort of thing went on for some time, till I realized my nerves were playing havoc with me and that I was behaving like a greenhorn. As likely as not, the pantheress was miles away. As I walked along, thinking my own thoughts, fits of alertness alternated with periods of carelessness and indifference. Time passed uneventfully, and I began to feel things were not as bad as they had been painted by the poachers. No doubt, like all villagers, they had exaggerated the matter grossly.

I reached the shoulder of the hill and began to descend the other side into a lush valley of heavy bamboos. A faint rustle and swish of leaves, then the sharp crack of a frond betokened only one thing. An elephant!

I stopped and gazed at the spot whence the sound had come. Much depended upon whether it was a solitary animal or one of a herd. If solitary, I might expect trouble should I go too close. If I had stumbled upon a herd, it was almost certain that, upon discovering my presence, they would take themselves off. The game-trail I was following led directly towards the origin of the sound. If I now abandoned the trail to avoid the elephant, I knew I would not be able to go far, for very soon I would be foundering in thickets of bamboo and thorn, no place in which to meet an angry panther or an equally angry elephant. So I made up my mind to stick to the trail.

The breeze blew strongly from behind and there were no further sounds from among the bamboos in front. I waited awhile, but the

silence continued. This indicated that the elephant had become aware of my presence, having scented me. Either he had moved away, or he was waiting for me to come closer.

No, had he moved away I would in all probability have heard him, for although these giant creatures can walk almost soundlessly, in that heavy undergrowth there would have been at least some faint sounds of his passage. I therefore concluded that he was waiting for me to approach. I delayed for another ten minutes, hoping the elephant would change his mind and avoid an encounter. He did not move. Perhaps he was thinking the same thing.

I should have waited longer, but I became impatient and decided to oust the beast. It was a wrong move, and one that nearly ended disastrously.

Thinking that a nonchalant approach on my part would frighten him off, I began to whistle loudly and advanced boldly along the game-trail. The result was immediate. The elephant charged. He screamed in the way of all elephants when attacking, partly to inflate their own courage and partly to strike terror into their victims, and came crashing through the bamboos straight towards me. The green undergrowth parted violently to reveal a monstrous head with gleaming tusks, a trunk coiled inwards between them, and ears laid tightly back against the skull.

I thought quickly. No rogue elephant had been proclaimed in this area. Therefore, to shoot this monster would mean endless trouble for me with the people of the Forest department. To run away would invite being chased and caught within a short distance. To try to stop him by wounding him, in the knee if possible, would be cruel and cause him endless suffering.

There was but one possibility. A very slight one, but I took it. Shouting loudly, I aimed the rifle over his head and fired a round into the air. If this did not stop him, I knew the next round would have to be at the elephant, if I intended to remain alive.

It worked! The giant animal braked hard by planting all four feet into the ground. There was a cloud of dust and fallen leaves as he slithered to a halt. Knowing his courage had failed him, I seized the advantage by running three or four steps forward and firing a second round into the air.

The huge beast turned about. The note of anger had died out of his scream when he trumpeted shrilly again, this time with a note of fear as he swayed in indecision and then bolted; the short tail which had been stuck out behind in the manner of all charging elephants was now between his hind legs like that of a whipped cur. The noise of his departure died away and I sat down disconsolately upon a nearby stone.

I was glad I had not been compelled to fire at the elephant, but I was disgusted at myself for not having exercised more patience by sitting it out rather than by advancing and so precipitating a charge. For my rifle shots, among those hills, had made a terrific racket. The hope I had entertained of the pantheress showing herself, or attacking me, was now gone. Only half-an-hour had passed since leaving camp. Would it be worth my while to carry on along the track I had been following for the remaining ninety minutes before turning back to the river as arranged?

A few moments' thought made me realize the futility of crying over spilt milk. So I stood up and continued along the trail. There was little danger from the pantheress for the next ten minutes or so. The noise of the rifle shots would have frightened her. The elephant, and any others like him, would now be far away. I made rapid progress through the bamboos, which eventually thinned out as the ground rose gradually higher from the basin of the Cauvery river. The vegetation changed slightly and I came upon a parkland of *babul, boram* and dwarf tamarind trees interspersed with areas of long grass, and here the friendly game-trail I had been following all the way from the big river gave out. Rather, it became lost among innumerable other *paths* that crisscrossed this parkland, which was obviously a favourite grazing ground for deer.

Little pellets of dung lay everywhere, the larger ones made by sambar and the smaller by spotted deer. To my right was quite a mound of tiny pellets underneath a fig tree, now laden with a rich red harvest fruit. Thousands of these figs had fallen to the ground, knocked down by monkeys and all manner of birds by day, and the huge fruit-bats, called 'flying fox' in India, by night. The maker of the large heap of tiny dung-pellets was a jungle-sheep, which we call 'kakar' or 'muntjac.'

These pretty animals, which reach the height of a small sheep and are coloured a uniform reddishbrown, are very gracefully shaped, the males having short, bifurcated horns. They love figs and other wild fruit. The stags, particularly, have the habit of coming all the way back to a chosen spot to pass their dung on alternate days. All hunters, human and animal, know this habit, and so all they have to do when they come across such a spot is to conceal themselves adequately and wait long enough for the return.

Carnivores are well versed in the habits and movements of the deer family and all the lesser animals that form their prey. They have to be, if they would eat. So this lovely parkland, filled as it was with deer, would be a very likely place in which to come across the pantheress and I redoubled my efforts to look for her.

I had gone some distance when, from a direction a little to the

right and before me, I heard a series of bird-like calls. The cries grew louder as they approached rapidly. Wild dogs! A pack of them was hunting down a quarry and the chase was coming in my direction. I stepped quickly behind the sheltering trunk of a nearby tamarind tree.

The wild dog of the Indian forest is the cleverest of all hunters and the implacable foe of every living creature. Once a pack of these creatures scents or sees a deer and gives chase, its fate is sealed. They hunt it down mercilessly and intelligently. The main body of dogs run behind their quarry, giving voice to a hunting cry that resembles the high-pitched call of a bird more than anything else, while a few dogs gallop ahead at terrific speed and on both flanks of the quarry. These flankers then ambush the victim and worry it, if they are unable to bring it down themselves, till the main body catches up and completes the job. I have seen a sambar doe, worried by these flankers, cross a dry riverbed with her entrails trailing in the sand for yards behind her, both eyes bitten out, and dogs hanging by their teeth to her throat and flanks.

I heard the clashing sound of horns against wood and a splendid sambar stag appeared. Foam flecked his mouth and sprayed backwards to his neck and shoulders, and his eyes were wide with terror as he galloped in headlong flight. The next instant there was a terrific roar and a mighty striped form launched itself through the air and directly on to the sambar' back.

My earlier thoughts had proved correct. A tiger had been patrolling the parkland in search of a meal. He had heard the wild dogs approach and knew they were pursuing a quarry that was coming his way. Ordinarily, tigers avoid wild dogs and fear them for their reckless bravery, their intelligence and their numbers. Probably this tiger would have avoided them too but for the chance that the hunted animal and his pursuers happened to be coming in his direction. So before he quite realized what he should do about it, he took the decisive step.

For this same reason, the tiger had not discovered my own approach from behind him. His keener hearing had appraised him of the wild dog's hunting cries before I had heard them and he had been listening intently in that direction and had not caught the faint sounds I may have made.

The sambar's back bent to the sudden weight of the tiger and he let out a hoarse bellow of terror. Their tightly entangled bodies sank from view into the long grass. I heard the sharp crack of bone as the vertebral column was broken skilfully by the tiger, and the drumming of the stag's hooves upon the earth as the twitching muscles and nerves of his four legs continued to respond to the last message to flee. Upon this scene, the next instant, burst the pack of baying snarling

wild dogs!

Recovering from their momentary surprise at seeing themselves forestalled, they quickly rallied. In a flash they surrounded the tiger and the body of the quarry they regarded as their own. I counted nine of them.

The bird-like hunting call that had been coming from the pack only a moment earlier changed abruptly to a series of long and plaintive notes. I had heard these cries on an earlier occasion, many years before, in the far-distant jungles of the Chamala Valley. There a pack of wild dogs had been chasing a tiger and this queer new cry was the same those dogs had made on that occasion. They were summoning reinforcements. Every wild dog within miles would hasten to their aid. It appeared to be an unwritten law of the species that no member dared disobey.

The tiger rose to his feet threateningly and I could see him clearly. His body turned slowly to enable him to see how many enemies beset him. His face, was contorted hideously as he snarled and roared with all the strength of his lungs, and his tail twitched from side to side spasmodically, a visible indication of nervous tension, rage, doubt and an unaccountable fear of these unruffled, implacable and cruelly clever foes.

The circle of dogs stood fast, legs firmly yet slightly outspread, each member of the pack now making that loud, shrill summons for help. The roars of the tiger and the yelping call of the nine wild dogs were pandemonium. The jungle echoed and re-echoed with the din.

The tiger realized that every second lost now counted in favour of his foes. In two bounds he charged the dog directly in his *path*. The dog skipped nimbly aside, while those behind leaped forward to attack from the rear. The tiger sensed this and whirled around, flaying wildly to right and left with his two forepaws. The dogs within reach of those mighty paws fell back helter-skelter, but one was too slow. The raking talons struck the dog's hindquarters, his body was thrown into the air with one leg almost torn off, and the dogs behind the tiger leaped forward to bite off chunks of flesh from his sides. Once more the tiger whirled around, once again his enemies scattered before him, while those at the back and on both sides raced forward to bite him where they could.

The tiger feinted and made a double-turn and the dogs from behind him that had rushed forward could not turn back. They met the full force of his powerful forelegs with their widely extended talons. Two quick blows and two more dogs were torn asunder. One of them tried to drag itself away, but its nearness to the tiger tempted him to make a false move that immediately offset the advantage he had just gained by his clever double-turn. He pounced upon the

disembowelled wild dog and buried his fangs in its body.

The dogs from behind and both sides now fell upon him and covered his body, tearing out scraps of the living flesh. The tiger roared and roared again, but now there was a note of fear in each roar.

The huddle of tearing rending beasts disintegrated and the tiger had freed himself for the moment. There were now but six dogs around him and some of them were injured. But the tiger was bleeding profusely from the many wounds he had received. He gasped for breath. The dogs would not relax. From all sides they renewed the attack, yelping and snapping. The tiger roared again, but not nearly so loudly. The will to continue the fight was ebbing. He was definitely afraid.

Just then quite another sound could be heard above the pandemonium: the distant cries of answering wild dogs, not from one direction, but from several, all at once. Reinforcements.

The harassed tiger heard them too, and the fight went out of him. He turned tail and raced away with the six dogs, despite their wounds and exhaustion, after him.

Within a minute the reinforcements began to arrive. First three dogs, then another, and yet another. They halted a moment at the scene of battle and sniffed the blood-tainted grass and the three mangled dogs. This roused them to a fury and they growled and snarled. Then they raced in the wake of the fleeing tiger and his six pursuers.

Soon a larger pack of about a dozen dogs arrived on the scene. In a few seconds they had taken stock of the situation and followed the five that had preceded them. The fate of that tiger was sealed, for by now there were two dozen wild dogs on his trail. They would not relax their pursuit till they had caught him and torn him to shreds.

The sounds of the chase died away in the distance as I stepped from behind the tamarind tree to look at the three dead dogs and the scene of battle. The sambar stag that the tiger had slain lay untouched a few feet away. After disposing off the tiger, no doubt the surviving dogs would return and eat their fill.

Tiny had returned by the time I arrived and Merwan showed up soon after. Neither of them had seen or heard anything. It was quite late when Donald returned. He had met the tracks of a panther and not long after had passed a cave. Associating the two, Donald had thrown stones into the cave, expecting and hoping the panther would emerge. Instead, a sloth bear had dashed forth with two cubs riding on her back. She was greatly annoyed at being disturbed and Donald would have been compelled to shoot her in self-defence, had she seen him. Fortunately, this did not happen. The bear rushed blindly

forward into the jungle, and that was the end of that. No panther could have shared a cave with a family of bears, and so Donald passed on.

Strangely enough, none of the party had heard the shots I had fired to frighten off the elephant and everyone was greatly interested in my account of the fight between the tiger and the wild dogs.

This time we all helped in gathering wood for the camp fire and arranged to take watch-turns of two hours, each. Then came an early dinner, followed by a smoke and a chat. Eventually the conversation began to die as, one by one, we became sleepy. It was only nine o'clock but time to turn in. We had chosen Thangavelu to be on watch for the first two hours. We did this deliberately, for later on he was bound to fall asleep anyhow. Merwan came next, followed by myself, Donald and Tiny. Merwan had tried hard to exchange turns with Tiny, but the big man was too clever for him.

As I fell asleep, a tiger began to roar somewhere over the hill, where I had been that day. I thought to myself that it must be the mate of the animal that the wild dogs had pursued and surely slain.

When Thangavelu called Merwan at eleven o'clock, he would not wake and the ensuing argument disturbed me. I told Thangavelu to throw cold water over him, but the former felt that such conduct by a servant might be misunderstood. So I had to get up and throw the water myself. Merwan sat up with a jerk and was very annoyed, but he took his revenge at 1 a.m., when the time came to wake me, for he did so with cold water. Merwan is like that!

He told me that he had heard a panther sawing a few minutes after midnight, apparently on the hill behind us and pretty far away. Then he told me something that was very important indeed. Only a few minutes before he woke me, a bird, which he thought must have been a jungle fowl, had clucked a noisy alarm and flapped away heavily. This had been quite close. Merwan remarked that he had almost forgotten to mention the incident; he thought it was a matter of no consequence anyhow!

I said nothing in reply as he covered himself up before falling asleep, but I knew the matter was of great consequence indeed. Why should a jungle fowl be so alarmed that it had cried out and left the secure place where it had sat to roost the evening before, to risk changing its perch and a flight in darkness? They don't do that unless some potential danger has passed very close. Perhaps it was a python searching for food. Perhaps a wildcat or a tree-civet. Perhaps even a panther.

The more I thought about it, the more I felt that here was the animal we were seeking, that it had returned to our camp with the deliberate intention of stalking and killing one or more of us. I

arranged another log on the fire to make more light to see by. Then I changed my position so that I sat with my back to the nearest *muthee* tree, that grew a few feet from the water. This enabled me to face the jungle, with my companions a little before me and to the right, while I was safe from an attack from the rear. Then I settled down to listen and watch intently.

Nothing happened till after two o'clock. The gurgling sound of the river as it cascaded over the rocks prevented me from hearing the more subtle noises of the forest. A fish plopped loudly in the water, followed by a yet greater splash, perhaps a bigger fish, or even a crocodile in pursuit of the first fish. On the opposite bank of the river a night heron raised a wailing, plaintive cry, and a dark shadow caught my eye against the lighter hue of the star-studded sky: a giant horned-owl, a species confined to the forests and feeding on the smaller mammals, including rabbits.

Just then I heard a faint hissing, rasping sound. I could scarcely distinguish it because of the murmur of the rushing water. It stopped and then was repeated, quite close at hand, from near a clump of bushes a little beyond my sleeping companions, where the jungle grew thickest and was pitch-black. I had heard that sound before and recognized it at once.

I knew then that the pantheress was hiding in the thicket that was closest to the spot where Don and the others were sleeping, and that she was working up her courage for an attack. In a few seconds she would reach the point of springing upon them.

I could not see her. Only the blackness of the thicket. If I shone my torch on that blackness now, it might reveal the pantheress or it might not—according to whether or not she was sheltering behind some bush or shrub. Should the latter be the case, I knew full well she would disappear as soon as she saw the light. So I decided to wait a little longer.

But the pantheress decided to wait no more. She acted.

Voicing the short, sharp roars made by her kind when they charge, she sprang clear of the thicket to land a few feet from the sleeping men. With the next bound she would be amongst them.

I was waiting for this and it was fortunate that I had the rifle to my shoulder with my thumb on the light switch.

The torch-beam cut through the darkness like a knife and reflected the blazing eyes of the pantheress. She hesitated a second, taken completely by surprise and dazzled by the light. I was about to press the trigger when there was a shattering explosion, followed quickly by a second shot.

'Beat you to it, dad!' yelled Don, as he sprang to his feet, having wakened and fired his two shots while still lying on the ground.

Then the other sleepers awoke, and their surprise was indeed comical. Thangavelu just yelled. Tiny sat bolt upright and remarked, half asleep, 'Mother dear!' But Merwan surpassed them; he rolled about as if he'd been shot himself.

Then they saw the dead pantheress, or almost dead, I should say. For she was gasping and twitching still, while life faded slowly from eyes that were held in my torch-beam. They died to a cold, watery blue and became still. Then I knew that the pantheress was dead.

We gathered around and examined her. A fine specimen of a female. Truly my heart had not been in that night's work and I regretted every part I played in hunting her from the time we heard her story. I consoled myself with the thought that what had to be done had been done, and I left it at that, but my congratulations to Don on his prowess were more heartfelt than he ever suspected.

Seven

*Sher Khan and the Bettamugalam Man-Eater**

MANY YEARS AGO A RETIRED BRITISH ADMINISTRATOR, POPULARLY known as the Collector in those days, had acquired for himself 300 acres of jungle land on the northern slopes of the Gutherayan range of hills in the district of Salem, where he built an incredible bungalow. He built it all of stone and to the pattern of a castle.

This man loved the jungle and he preserved it at a tremendous expense to himself by engaging an army of coolies to hack away the thorny undergrowth and the lantana plants which, in those years, were just beginning to envelop the forests of southern India.

Since then the lantana has grown apace and now covers thousands of acres of Reserved Forest land. Various government departments, including the forest department, have tried and are trying in vain to eradicate this scourge. Spraying with a poisonous solution can obviously be done only on a very limited scale. A white bug has been found which multiplies in millions; it covers the lantana bushes, blackens the stem, branches, all leaves, and kills all the lantana in perhaps an acre or two of land. Then something happens to the bugs themselves: they die within a few days, from some poison absorbed from the lantana itself, which thus gains the ultimate victory.

Jungle fires rage periodically, particularly during the hot weather. The lantana is burnt to the ground, only to spring up again and

flourish with the coming of the rains, fertilized by its own ashes.

Incidentally, the juice from a few freshlycrushed leaves of this plant, rubbed Upon a scratch or an abrasion on the skin, will assist the wound to heal completely. It is as effective as tincture of iodine, with the added advantage that it does not irritate.

But to return to the British Collector and his 300 acres: he called his place Bettamugalam Estate, after the name given to the local sub-taluk area, and his stone house he called 'Jungly Castle.' Cleaned of the strangling lantana, the natural forest grew apace. The grass that flourished in the glades between the trees attracted bison and deer, which in their turn brought their natural foes, tigers, panthers, and the still more voracious wild dogs.

Conditions then began to change. The British Collector died and Bettamugalam Estate, with Jungly Castle, was bought by an Anglo-Indian who did not have the means to keep the place up to the standard of the former owner. Once more the lantana started to encroach upon the grassy glades, and as a consequence the bison and deer decreased in numbers. But the carnivores remained and they grew hungry.

Then the Anglo-Indian died in his turn, and no legal owner came forward. Jungly Castle fell into disrepair. Villagers came on moonlit nights in bullock carts and stole the cut granite blocks, pulling down the walls to get them. For these stones, especially when they could be obtained free, offered first-class material with which to construct the walls of their own huts.

The bison had by this time vanished, and the herds or deer had almost disappeared. The tigers, panthers and wild dogs that congregated to eat the deer followed them. Only the jungle fowl, spurfowl and peafowl remained to increase in numbers, for the heavy undergrowth of lantana gave ideal cover. Otherwise, the whole area assumed a forlorn appearance. Now and again an odd tiger or panther would pass that way, hoping but generally in vain, for a stray spotted deer or jungle-sheep to break his fast. He was generally very hungry but there was nothing to be got.

Now, in the village of Aiyur, a little over four miles away, lived a man of about twenty-five years, whose name was Gurappa. Gurappa had married very late in life for one of his caste and status, the usual age being around seventeen to eighteen years for a boy and thirteen to fourteen years for a girl. But Gurappa's father could not get his son married earlier, for they were a poor family, and the parents of every prospective bride turned down the marriage of their daughter to a mere yokel, the son moreover of such a poor father. But a girl was found at last. I was told that she was very deaf and had walked with a limp from birth. Very likely these impediments had caused her parents

to agree to the marriage with Gurappa, who was so poor.

Now another problem presented itself. The bridegroom had no house. His father had sold the hut the family had lived in. Not even in India can a bridegroom bring his bride home on their wedding day to no house!

So Gurappa decided to build one in a hurry. True, he had no money, but fortunately a good number of stones still remained of Jungly Castle, although the best and largest of them had already been pilfered.

Scorning to wait for a moonlight night, the would-be bridegroom begged the village headman to lend him his cart. With a long-term policy in view of extracting free labour from Gurappa in return when the harvest came around, the village *patel* consented.

It is safer if there are no witnesses when one sets out to commit a felony. Gurappa knew this, so he set out alone after his midday meal, intending to collect the stones and be back by sundown. Working single-handed is invariably a back-breaking job, as he soon found out. To lever the stones out of the crumbling walls with the short crowbar he had brought for the purpose, and to carry each stone and load it on to the bullock cart, took much energy and time, calling for a fair number of resting periods. The sun had dipped behind the hills to the west and the nightjars were already calling from the sandy track along which the cart had come, when Gurappa decided to call it a day and bring away the first load. Tomorrow he would borrow somebody else's cart and fetch a second load.

So he beat the bony bulls with a piece of broken bamboo. They started to walk dejectedly homewards, for this strange man, who was not their owner, had not bothered to feed or water them all day. Gurappa followed behind leisurely, his mind at peace for the moment. Up to now there had been nothing to disturb the bridegroom. No sound had he heard to cause him any uneasiness.

The waiting tiger that had seen him must have been very hungry indeed, if not on the verge of starvation, to act as he did. Perhaps he was sick or wounded and had been disabled from hunting his natural prey. Certainly he was not a regular man-eater, for nobody had been killed in this area by a tiger for quite a time.

The bulls hauled the cart past a *babul* tree, the lower half of which was smothered in lantana. The tiger must have been hiding within that lantana, for that was where he sprang from. When I came to the spot with a Forest Range Officer, several guards, the sub-inspector of police and a constable, just twenty-four hours later, some of the stems still bent down by the weight of the animal as he had lain in wait for Gurappa.

Probably Gurappa had never known what happened till he found

himself being carried away by a tiger. Then he must have struggled and screamed loudly, for the bulls took fright and bolted, hauling the heavily laden cart behind them. They did not get very far, for there was a curve in the track ahead, where it skirted some lower ground. In turning, the cart went off the track and down the *khud*, taking the bullocks with it.

Miracles often happen, even with bullock carts. While the vehicle was considerably damaged, there was no injury to either bull. Freed from the restraining yoke, they found their way back to Aiyur, terrified but unhurt, long after the sun had set.

Adjacent to the village of Aiyur is a Forestry department school where officials already working in the department, along with students who have passed the required examination, undergo practical instruction in field forestry. A Range Officer is stationed at the school, along with two or three senior foresters and a number of guards and watchers, who look after the nurseries and departmental buildings.

The headman, alarmed by the fact that his build had returned without the cart, assumed that an elephant had attacked and smashed it, and had accounted for Gurappa in the process. With half the village trailing behind him, he sought the cooperation of the Range Officer for permission to send out a search party into the jungle. Permission was readily given, but there was a marked lack of enthusiasm among the villagers to volunteer. Finally four of five persons were persuaded to offer their services, but by this time darkness had already fallen. Even in broad daylight a wild elephant that has killed a man is something no villager will face. In pitch-darkness an encounter of this nature is not to be thought of. So the search was postponed till the next morning. The headman must have spent a sleepless night thinking of his cart, while cursing Gurappa for being the cause of his misfortune.

Early next day the search party set out. It did not take them long to find the cart at the bottom of the *khud,* but of Gurappa there was no sign. The tracks of the cart wheels and the bullocks, made in the soft sand, showed that the animals had taken the corner at a gallop; hence the accident. What had caused them to do that?

Still suspecting that an elephant was to blame, the villagers backtracked and soon found the real cause. The whole story was written in the dry, soft sand of the track. There was blood, the pug-marks of a tiger, and a distinct drag-mark, left by some part of the victim that had trailed along the ground. Fear fell upon them then. It was dangerous enough to encounter a possible rogue elephant. But they were many in number and an elephant might be expected to hesitate before attacking such a large party. Not a man-eating tiger. He might reappear at any moment, from anywhere, with disastrous

results.

Without further delay the group returned to Aiyur. Gurappa was dead beyond doubt. What could be gained by searching for him?

By chance, I happened to be camping at Sivanipalli that day. This little village lies about five miles to the west of Aiyur. It is a favourite spot of mine, and being just over fifty miles from Bangalore, I often go there at weekends. Incidentally, it marks the scene of the shooting of the only black panther that has ever been known in this region, the details of which adventure have been related in another story.*

The forest guard of Sivanipalli, who had gone to Aiyur to meet his superior, the Range Officer, returned at about noon to tell me what had happened to the unfortunate bridegroom, Gurappa. Carrying a torch and my sweater, with a pocketful of dry biscuits and a flask of tea for dinner in case I was delayed, I set out for Aiyur within fifteen minutes of hearing the news.

A report had already been made to the Forest department headquarters at Denkanikota, a small town eight miles to the north, by the Range Officer, so that shortly after my arrival the sub-inspector of police turned up on his motorcycle, with a constable on the pillion seat. Thus it came about that the two police officials, the Range Officer, a retinue of guards and myself came to the lantana thicket at the foot of the *babul* tree from which the tiger had sprung, almost twenty-four hours earlier, upon the unfortunate Gurappa as he had walked behind the bullock cart that was laden with stolen stones. The prologue of this story, as I have told it, had already been pieced together by me from scraps of conversation with the two officers and their assistants. The sub-inspector of police, who was a Brahman and a fatalist, remarked more than once on the connection in the web spun by fate between the old British Collector, long dead and gone, who had owned Bettamugalam Estate and Jungly Castle, and the modern bridegroom, Gurappa, who had no house at all and had been striving to build one. Not quite seeing the point, I quipped that there might also be something in the thought that fate may have taken a dim view of the general situation and decided to punish someone who was in the act of robbing the dead. I meant this as a joke, but was surprised at the manner in which my suggestion caught on. The superstitious Brahman and the somewhat nervous Range Officer accepted my point completely.

Nobody was keen on looking for what was left of Gurappa.

As I have said, I found the spot in the lantana where the tiger had been hiding before it sprang upon its victim. The drag-mark was still faintly visible, although much of it had been obliterated during the night by the action of the wind upon the sand, grass and leaves, and the movements of ants and other insects.

However, we were able to follow for a hundred yards or so when, quite unexpectedly, our search ended. An 'aeroplane' tree was growing here—known thus by the local Tamil inhabitants because it sheds its seeds by a wonderfully clever and novel device. Each seed is situated at the junction of two three-inch-long leaf-like blades exactly resembling in miniature the twin propellers of an aeroplane. These blades fall from the parent tree and are spun and carried by the breeze, along with the seed, to incredible distances before they tumble to the ground. In the shade of this tree the grass was still green, and protruding from this grass, as if beckoning to us, was a human arm and hand, the five fingers spread and pointing upwards.

We had found Gurappa at last—what was left of him!

Peculiarly enough, the upper parts of his body, from breast to head, had been untouched. While one arm stretched upwards, the fingers of the other hand were stuffed into the mouth as if to stifle a scream. The eye sockets were empty, because the black ants had already eaten away the eyeballs. Then red ants had come, and these now swarmed over the face and skin. In many places the black outer skin had been devoured, exposing patches of white and red flesh, now rotting underneath. The reason why hyaenas and jackals had up to now not touched these toothsome portions was simple to guess. Red ants are notorious for their aggressive nature and painful stings.

But there was hardly anything left of Gurappa's body below his chest. The tiger had eaten his fill, while the scavengers of the night had removed the rest.

The foliage of the 'aeroplane' tree had hidden from the vultures what the tiger and the others had left, for had these birds arrived before us, nothing at all would have remained.

The stench of death and putrefaction hung heavily in the still evening air. Flies squatted in myriads on the stems of the surrounding grass, prevented from settling on the rotting flesh by the army of red ants that had already driven away their cousins. A terrific battle appeared to have been waged between the two species, as large numbers of dead, of both varieties, strewed the ground for a yard around Gurappa's head and arms. Now and again a sorely-wounded member of one of the opposing armies tried to drag itself away.

The tiger would certainly not return to eat the little that remained. Why he had left it in the first place was unaccountable; but he would anyway give the red ants a wide berth.

The sub-inspector ordered his underling to arrange for the removal of the remains. Then he wrote an unnecessarily verbose statement which I was asked to sign as a witness. It was getting dark when we returned to the Forest Rest House at Aiyur. The Range Officer offered me accommodation at his bungalow for the night, but the thought of

the dry biscuits in my pocket made me decide to return to my camp at Sivanipalli and the corned meat that awaited me there. I had my torch, and after all the tiger might not be a confirmed man-eater.

So I started out to the dismay of the two officers, who shouted a warning behind me that I might never reach Sivanipalli. The path wound downhill mostly, between lantana, scrub and scattered *babul* saplings till, as a lower level was reached, the trees became loftier and clumps of heavy bamboo grew in among them. The darkness became intense, through which the beam from my torch cut only a narrow pencil of light.

Suddenly a feeling of great uneasiness came over me—rather, a feeling of mortal fear. Why, I could not imagine. I had heard no sound, nor had I caught any audible cries of alarm from the deer and other creatures in the jungle to warn me of danger. Complete silence reigned on every side. There was only the soft crunch of my own rubber-soled boots on the ground, and the occasional crack of a twig or crackle of a leaf as I trod upon it.

I halted abruptly and spun around, fully expecting to see the tiger stalking me from behind. But there was nothing to be seen, not even the glimmer of a firefly. There was nothing to be heard; not even the chirping of a friendly cricket.

Then I knew why I was so afraid: it was the idea of absolute loneliness. There was no living creature nearby to witness what happened to me. Nothing, and nobody to help. And, although I could not see him in the gloom, or hear him, even in that absolute silence, I was as certain of the presence of the tiger there as I was of my own.

I have found that at times of great peril in the jungle, the human reflexes act in one of two ways. The trumpeting scream of a charging rogue elephant, or the guttural roar of an attacking tiger or panther, sometimes galvanizes the victim into precipitate flight, or else he is so paralysed by fear that he is rooted to the spot and quite incapable of movement. It is rare, indeed, that the victim can think at all, much less think clearly, of what he should, or rather could, do in the circumstance. There is no time for thinking.

But in this case there was no screaming elephant before me, nor a roaring tiger for that matter. Only silence, and the certain knowledge that the man-eater was there. And the reflex that came to me was to run, and to run fast, as fast as I could, away from that dreadful spot. I had the greatest difficulty in restraining myself, for I knew that if I started to run it would be just what the tiger would like me to do. For then he would attack. All tigers, including man-eaters, know that every other creature is afraid of them. They are accustomed to striking terror into the hearts and minds of their prey, and with that knowledge comes the greater confidence that enables them to hunt so

successfully.

I knew at that moment that the only thing that could save me from the tiger would be to act otherwise. He was lurking somewhere, watching and waiting for me. Perhaps he was behind, perhaps ahead, or may be to one side or the other, waiting and watching for an opportunity to spring upon me. He would have done so long before had it not been for my torch and the bright beam of light that was cutting through the darkness. This had worried him. If I wanted him to attack, all I had to do was extinguish the torch and start running. Then he would come.

I thought quickly. And I kept on walking at a measured pace, flashing the torch behind me, to both sides and then in front. The *path* was narrow, not more than six feet wide at the most.

The track turned a corner and ahead of me the light revealed a rock, standing to the left and about a hundred yards away. It was a sloping rock and appeared to be about six to eight feet high. I felt that I could run up and on to it without difficulty, provided I had a sufficiently long start. For I had had an idea. Here was a suitable place at which to try to tempt the man-eater to show himself.

As I turned the idea over in my mind, I continued to walk forward. Those hundred yards were far too long to risk a show-down. The speed of a charging tiger is something fantastic and has to be seen to be believed. But when the rock was fifty yards away, I decided to take the chance.

Making certain my rifle was cocked, and fixing the location of the rock clearly in my mind, I suddenly extinguished the torch and ran as fast and as hard as I could.

The darkness, when the torch went out, was intense. I could not see a thing. That was why I had taken care to face the rock and fix its location before putting out the torch and starting to run.

It took quite a few seconds for the tiger to gather his wits and realize that his victim had actually done what he had been waiting for. As I ran, I was just beginning to think that perhaps there was no tiger at all and that my nerves had made a fool of me, when there was a shattering roar from behind and the man-eater launched his attack. I heard that roar, but I could run no faster anyway.

I was only a few feet ahead of the tiger when I reached the rock and ran up the slope. Then I whirled around, raised the rifle to my shoulder and pressed the torch-switch with my left thumb all simultaneously. The man-eater had reached the base of the rock and was crouched for the spring that would carry him to the top when the rifle went off, almost at point-blank range. With the crash of the explosion he somersaulted backwards while I worked the underlever of the .405 to place the second round in the breach. Then I pressed the

trigger.

Nothing happened.

A moment later, with a loud snarl the tiger leaped to its left and disappeared into the long grass that grew there. Working the underlever again, I ejected the cartridge that had misfired and fired the next round at the spot where the tiger had just vanished.

I had been too frightened when I fired the first shot, but I distinctly remember hearing the echo of the second one reverberating against the slopes of Gulhatti hill, which I could not see in the darkness but which is within a mile of the rock I stood upon.

The growling had ceased. Had my second bullet found its mark? Had the tiger collapsed from the effect of my first shot? Perhaps both had taken effect. Or had I missed entirely? Worse still, perhaps I had only wounded the brute.

With the torch still shining upon the bushes where the tiger had vanished, I sat down on the rock to collect my scattered wits and control my breathing. Mostly, to try to think. Only then did I realize how narrow an escape I had had. Had the tiger been closer behind me, or to either side or ahead, he might have cut me off before I could reach the rock. Moreover, had the cartridge that had misfired been one ahead in the magazine of my rifle, it would have failed at the crucial moment and the man-eater would certainly have completed his spring.

When I grew a little calmer I began to wonder what had happened to the man-eater. It seemed inconceivable that I could have missed him at point-blank range. Then I remembered I had been running fast and had rushed up the rock at the last moment. Fear, excitement and exertion had made me breathe hard and this had evidently caused me to press the trigger unconsciously, causing me to miss entirely or perhaps just wound the beast.

It was impossible for me to follow up in that darkness. If I had missed him, he would have been scared away entirely. If he was wounded, it was very unlikely that the man-eater would resume the pursuit if I continued on my way to Sivanipalli. So after a few moments I decided to do that and return the next morning to take up the trail.

I reached Sivanipalli without event and lay down in my little tent, still thinking of what should be done the next day. Then the dried biscuits in my pocket reminded me that I was hungry and I got up to make tea and open the tin of meat that had been the cause of the whole incident.

There are no poojarees or aboriginal trackers at Sivanipalli, but there was Sher Khan, a character who had led a colourful existence and must at the time have been about forty years old. He was a

Muslim, a poacher of game, a timber thief, and the suspected author of several dacoities on a minor scale, when bullock carts carrying sacks of grain to the villages of Denkanikota and Anchetty had been held up and robbed at night. The method of dacoity had been as simple as it had been effective.

The carts used to travel by night in order to save time. Generally, half-a-dozen of them would move, one behind the other for company and for protection from wild animals, particularly elephants, and of course the evil spirits that are said to be everywhere. Highway robbery, up to that time, was unheard of.

The first case reported to the police was by five cartmen who had been behind one another from Anchetty to Denkanikota. They were on the ghat road when it had happened, nine miles from their destination. The time was 1 a.m. and the bulls strained at their loads on the steep gradient. Each driver sat in his cart, more than half asleep. Suddenly a voice hailed them from the darkness of the roadside. It was harsh and loud. They saw no man, but the voice said that a gang of dacoits was hiding by the wayside. They had loaded muskets and all would be well if they followed orders. Then followed the orders. They were very simple.

'Get down from your carts, all five of you, and walk back for a full mile. When you reach the tenth milestone, you may sit dawn. Light a fire and wait there till morning. When daylight comes, you may return to your carts. Remember, some of us will follow and keep a watch over you till dawn. If any one of you dares to disobey, he will be shot without further warning. Remember also that we promise we shall not harm your carts or animals. You are poor men and we do not want to hurt you. It is the rich men's belongings, carried in your carts, that we want.'

The cartmen obeyed. They were thankful they had been spared. Early next morning they found their carts, standing where they had been left. Some of the foodstuff had been stolen, but not all if it. Only the more valuable items. The gang could not have been a very large one after all, or they would have taken everything.

This happened two or three times more, on other roads and tracks leading to Denkanikota and Anchetty, before the carts stopped moving at night and police patrols took their place. Several suspects were rounded up, including Sher Khan. They were beaten and locked up. But all of them always affirmed complete innocence and all of them had alibis.

That was how I first met Sher Khan. He was returning to Sivanipalli after one such beating and complained aloud of the injustice that was rampant in this world.

But there was a mischievous twinkle of insincerity in his eye as he spoke.

As I said, he was a Muslim, and the literal translation of his name is 'Chief among Tigers'. He was a ruffian, but a very likeable one, and that is how he became my friend. I would never fail, when at Sivanipalli, to visit his little house and drink tea with him, and he would never fail to return my call.

So I went to Sher Khan early in the morning after my adventure, and asked him to assist me. For I was confident that I had not missed the tiger when I had fired at point-blank range. I knew I must have hit it. That meant following up a wounded tiger in the jungle, and to do that there must be two persons. Following a blood trail through bushes, over leaves and on hard and stony ground requires concentration of eyesight and mind. One must look here, there and everywhere, for a speck of blood or a mere smear of the underside of a leaf, or against a stem or rock. While you are engaged in so looking, the wounded tiger might be just ahead, waiting for you, or he may be lying to the right or the left, concealed behind a tuft of grass, a clump of bamboo, a tree-trunk or a termite-hill, waiting till you come within springing distance. There is a third possibility, and that is he may be stalking you from behind even while you are looking for him. But you are blissfully unaware of his presence, because your attention is concentrated on the ground, following his trail. On the other hand, if you try to keep an effective lookout for the wounded beast, you will soon find you have lost the trail. You just cannot do both jobs effectively, and so a second person is essential. One of you concentrates on following the tiger's bloodspoor and tracks, while the other keeps a sharp lookout ahead, to the right, left and also behind. In the hands of this second person lies not only his own life, but the life of his companion.

Sher Khan volunteered to help without hesitation, but insisted that I drink the customary cup of tea with him before we set out. A clap of his hands and one of his four wives responded. He told her to make: 'Attcha-cha-first class!' for the *sahib*.

Being a Muslim, he was allowed to have four legal wives—and he had them. Most of us find it a problem to manage one, but he managed all four with ease! And this is how he did it.

Sher Khan showed no preference towards any one of his four spouses—either to the youngest or the most recent or the prettiest. They were all kept strictly *gosha*—that is to say, they were compelled to cover their faces with a *bourkha* when they went out in public. No man was allowed to look upon them. I, as a very particular friend, had the privilege of seeing their faces, and even of speaking to them—but

very sparingly, mind you—when I visited his house.

Sher Khan made it a practice to divide the household duties among his four wives on a weekly-roster basis. For a week one of them would be responsible for the cooking of all the food, with a second to assist her; the third would be responsible for washing all the utensils; the fourth for the household work such as sweeping, mending, washing of clothes, etc. The following week, the roster would change, and so on week by week thereby dividing all the work very equitably among all four. Sher Khan himself would not lift a finger to do any household work. He did the marketing—if his rather nefarious activities could be so described—and brought home the earning, or the money, whichever you my prefer to call it. The wife who did the hardest work for that particular week, namely the cook, he would sleep with two days in the week, the remaining three women one day each. Fridays and Sundays were 'off days' from that sort of thing. 'Days of rest' as he called them.

They were a poor family, but disciplined, happy and contented. The women never quarrelled with him and hardly ever among themselves. For if they did, a beating would be administered; fairly, equitably and impartially, each recalcitrant wife receiving an equal number of blows or cuffs according to the nature of the offence. And in spite of the often undeniably pressing demands made upon him, he had no children.

As soon as we had drunk our tea we were off. Sher Khan announced that he had no gun and brought a rusty sword with him instead. He remarked that it had belonged to his father, and to his father's father's father's father, who was a soldier serving under the great Tipu Sultan, the tiger of Mysore. The mathematics involved in the problem of checking whether this man's great-great-grandfather could have lived in Tipu's lifetime are rather too involved for me. In the meanwhile, we had walked out of earshot of all his wives and I raised an impersonal question, addressed perhaps to the air: 'A voice comes out of the darkness and threatens to shoot many cartmen. Yet there is no gun. How can that be, Sher Khan?'

The silence for a moment is complete. Then he replied. 'You may call me a liar if you wish, *sahib*. But that is exactly what happened. There was no gun at that time, nor any other. I never possessed one and still don't have a gun. And the gang consisted of myself and three of the wives, *sahib*. The fourth is too old. But she had the brains, and it was all her idea.'

And, I believed him.

We were nearly at our destination. There stood the sloping rock from which I had fired at the man-eater the previous night. This time it was to my right. We approached in silence and looked at the

ground. No blood was to be seen and the earth was too dry and hard for tracks. Without speaking, I pointed to the bushes bordering the *path* where the tiger disappeared from view.

I took the lead for the moment, with my Muslim friend directly behind. In spite of the prevailing dryness all around, it was evident that a heavy body had recently passed through. A couple of broken stems hung loosely, still joined to their parent-branch by the outer skins. A yard or two further and we saw it almost simultaneously: blood!

There was a splash of bright red on the carpet of dry, brown leaves that covered the ground. I touched it with my forefinger and rubbed it against my thumb. It was thick and coagulated, and by that I knew that my bullet of the night before had inflicted more than a mere surface wound. It had penetrated deeply.

We changed places now, and I put Sher Khan ahead of me. He would concentrate all his attention on following the blood trail, while I would cover him and myself in all four directions.

The Muslim was no born tracker, but what he lacked in ability as an aborigine he made up for in intelligence. He fussed and fumbled around, taking far more time than would a member of any of the jungle tribes in following such a trail, but he found one blood spot after another. The tiger had bled far more freely now. The exertions caused by his wounds had no doubt opened the wound. Splashes and pools of blood lay all along the trail, making it easy to follow.

I caught sight of a slight movement ahead and lightly touched Sher Khan with my hand. He halted at the prearranged signal and froze. With rifle to shoulder, I watched the spot from whence the movement came. I also watched on both sides and even glanced behind us. For wounded tigers are notoriously clever in lying in ambush or in creeping upon their enemies from behind.

The movement came again. A small branch swayed ominously a few feet ahead of us. I prepared for the attack. Stretching out my hand, I gripped Sher Khan by the shoulder and pulled him unceremoniously behind me.

The branch swayed again. I stared at it for a minute. And then I relaxed. A false alarm. I noticed the leaves on the swaying branch were all upside down. That is because it had been broken by an elephant and was hanging suspended to the place from which it was broken by the stems of some creepers that were strong enough to bear its weight.

There must be no talking whatever in a situation like the present, so I reached backwards, gripped Sher Khan, and once again placed him in the lead. Then I nodded my head as a signal for him to press on. We proceeded slowly and passed the suspended branch.

Under a bush we noticed that the dried grass had been dyed deeply with blood. It seemed to be all over the place, on the leaves and stems of the bush as well. The tiger must have lain down here. Perhaps he rolled on the ground. Perhaps he covered his injured face with his paws and got them all covered with gore too. That would account for the blood, spread so widely under the bush before us.

I touched Sher Khan again to halt him, and we listened for a full five minutes. But we heard not a sound. As carefully and silently as we were moving the two of us would necessarily have made some noise in the undergrowth over that dry terrain. If the tiger was nearby, he must surely have heard us. Then he would either growl in warning, attack, or slink away silently. But nothing of the kind happened.

The blood trail now unexpectedly veered to the left and we knew that the tiger was making for a small stream that skirted the foothills. The wound must have been taking effect, and thirst had driven him there for water. At that time of the year the stream was dry except for a few isolated pools here and there. The tiger was making for one of these pools and the chances were that when he reached it he would lie up in the vicinity till he recovered from his wound or died of it, a lingering, starving, horrible death.

I hate wounding an animal and spare no pains, when I have done so, to follow it up and put it out of its misery. From the amount and nature of the blood lost by the tiger it looked as if my bullet had inflicted a severe wound from which there was little chance of recovery. Once more I thought of the dreadful lingering death that was in store for this animal unless I succeeded in finding it.

I stopped Sher Khan and we conferred in whispers for a few minutes. I knew of a pool on the riverbed which I judged to be at least two miles away, but Sher Khan said there was a closer one, smaller but which held water throughout the year, higher up the stream and less than a mile from where we now stood. So we continued to follow the blood trail, and as the Muslim predicted, after a short distance it veered to the left and made for the smaller pool, now directly ahead.

The ground sloped as we approached the streambed and I was made aware of its nearness by the repeated cries of jungle fowl that sheltered in the thick belt of trees and undergrowth that lined both banks, sustained in summertime by the water that was hidden from sight but still flowed beneath the dry sand. In a few minutes the short dry grass, withered by the sun, was replaced by long green stems, the heat and sight of the sun was shut out by a canopy of trees, and I knew we had reached the rivulet.

The blood trail went straight ahead; we were in sight of the dry sands of the streambed, stretching to right and left. I can imagine the agony of the wounded beast that came here last night or in the early

hours of this morning in search of water to allay its burning thirst, only to be confronted by this waterless stretch.

But Sher Khan whispered that the pool was just around the corner to our left, now a stone's throw away, and unerringly the trail led in that direction. Once again I changed places with my friend and took the lead. Tracking was unnecessary now, as clearly the wounded tiger was making for the pool and I felt we would find it there. We turned a corner but I could see no pool. I stopped in silent perplexity, when Sher Khan came up from behind to point to an outcrop of flat rock which could just be seen above the sand of the stream and within a few feet of the further bank.

A plover rose into the air from the rock, crying 'Did-you-do-it! Did-you-do-it! Did-you-do-it!', and I knew that water lay hidden from my view in a hollow of that rock. The stream had narrowed there and both banks had come very close to each other. The undergrowth was dense, and the forest loomed menacingly around and above us from the ground that dipped down to the bed of the rivulet.

We halted again. There was silence and no indication of the tiger's presence. I looked down and could see no blood trail. Evidently it did not approach across the sandy bed, but kept to the cover of the undergrowth bordering the banks.

Forward we went once more. We were there at last, and what a sad story revealed itself in the water of the tiny pool and the sloping rock that led down to it! For the water was red with blood, and the rock was sticky with it, where the tiger had evidently lain in agony with his head in the water to assuage his thirst and to lessen the pain of his wound. His pug-marks were visible on the rock in several places, steeped in his own blood. Finally he had gone to the shelter of the bank and I knew that was where I would find him; laying in the cool of the undergrowth like all stricken animals, he would await his end with patience.

Then I remembered that this animal had been responsible for killing a human being, as far as could be made out for no apparent reason. If not brought to book, he would no doubt in time have became a confirmed man-eater. Motioning to Sher Khan to stay where he was, I advanced to meet him and finish him off.

I heard a slight sound behind me and looked around. Sher Khan was following. Perhaps he wanted to be present to witness the last scene in this drama. Perhaps he was just nervous at being left alone. We advanced into the dense undergrowth beneath the canopy of trees and were lost to sight.

The silence that had reigned all this while was then broken by a shattering roar that seemed to come from the very ground at my feet, and things began to happen very fast. Momentarily the undergrowth

was agitated violently and then a mighty form launched itself past, and almost over me, on to Sher Khan who was not two feet behind.

The Muslim yelled and swiped wildly his rusty sword. The blunt edge met the bulk of the springing tiger and the impetus of both objects caused the blade to bite into the flank of the animal. Sher Khan went down, still screaming, and the tiger fell on top him.

Fortunately, Sher Khan had the presence of mind to cover his head and face with his two arms as the tiger sought to bite him. Leaning forward, I placed the rifle behind its neck, ensuring the bullet would not endanger my friend, and pressed the trigger.

I fired once again while Sher Khan scrambled to his feet and leaped out of range of the dying creature's claws. Then the drama was over.

Strangely enough, my friend was practically unhurt except for a few scratches, and the reason was that my bullet of the night before had gone into his upper palate and come out above his nose. The whole frontal or nasal bone hung loosely by the flesh, a truly ghastly wound from which the poor beast could never have recovered.

It was fortunate that the blow my friend aimed at the tiger with his ancestor's rusty sword had met its mark for I was directly in line with it. Had he missed, Tipu, the Tiger of Mysore and his henchman of long ago, Sher Khan's ancestor, would have claimed one more victim! I would have been decapitated by the force of that blow.

Sher Khan laughed afterwards when I told him this. He said I had my own revenge when my bullet, fired into the tiger's neck, had passed but a few inches above his head. He asked me if he might have the skin of the animal as a memento of our encounter and I gladly gave it to him. For, despite his many faults and his rascality, Sher Khan is a brave man and a most likeable fellow. Above all, I admire the way in which he manages his four wives. Long may they be spared to him, and he to them.

We sat by the camp fire before I left him and swapped yarns. He told me some of his adventures while I smoked my pipe and listened. Beyond the leaves all was lost in the darkness of the jungle night. Now and again a burst of sparks soared skywards as one of us threw a fresh log on to the fire to keep it brightly burning.

From behind his hut came suddenly the jungle chorus of the jackal pack: 'Oooo-ooo-oooh; Ooo-where? Ooo-where? Here! Here! Heere! Hee-yeah! Heeee-yeah! Yah! Yah! Yah!'

After that there was an abrupt hush. A heavy, all-pervading silence. You can hear it, you feel it, you know it. It is the silence that heralds the unexpected. As complete as if a switch had been turned.

Then, far away across the hill the second came rolling down to us, permeating the jungle and riding across the tops of the trees in the

valley below.

'Oo-o-o-n-o-o-n! A-oongh - gah! A-oongh - gah! Oo—ugh! Oo - Ugh!'

A tiger roaring.

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* For map, see Chapter 1.
* *See The Black Panther of sivanipalli*.

Jungles Long Ago

Introduction

AMONG THE PLEASURES OF WRITING BOOKS ARE THE LETTERS THAT often come to an author from readers all over the world. Some of them are highly flattering and add to the writer's vanity as they record the hours of enjoyment derived from his stories. A few ask questions and demand an early answer, while others seek to put the author on the spot in one way or the other.

Recently I received a letter from England in which I was asked why I preach animal preservation in nearly all my books, while most of my stories are about shooting them. But I feel that most of my readers will believe and understand me when I say that I have never killed for pleasure, at least not since I was very young. I do plead guilty for the sins of my youth; but the urge to slay wantonly died in me comparatively early; since then I have been able to kill only in cases of necessity.

Due to something I once told Malcolm Barnes, my publisher, which he included in his foreword to my last book, Tales of the Indian Jungle, I have received many letters urging me to continue writing, if for no other reason than to increase public interest in the jungles and the wild life that remains in India. So I have decided to try to do just that, but in this new book there are no stories of shooting man-eaters, or of shooting anything for that matter. Instead, you will find reminiscences of adventures in the jungle a long time ago. Some of the things we did then were pointless; some were just crazy and I would not have the guts to undertake them again today, now that I am, I hope, a wiser man. And there is a chapter on occult lore and another on jungle medicine.

All these reminiscences are jewels in a long chain of memories; precious jewels that sparkle for me brightly as I gaze at each and remember it once again, reliving those wonderful days and nights when we passed each exciting moment so happily, so fully, with never a thought of the what-might-have-happened or what-might-happen. The present was all that mattered and we lived each moment to the full.

Those were the times when there were no problems, no frustrations, no anxieties for the future. We were of and in the jungle, and that was all that mattered—with the trees and the animals and the sunshine about us in the daytime, and the moon and the stars and the fireflies, the croaking of frogs and the chirping of the crickets by night, we were in a paradise of contentment, the calls of frightened deer and the chorus of a pack of jackals were the music to which we fell asleep beside the embers of our fires, stoked now and again by the one whose turn it was to be on 'sentry-go', so to speak, as he added a bunch of faggots or a small log, when the sparks would leap skywards, pursued by a billow of smoke.

Camp life was relaxing in every sense of the word; but we were strict, very strict, about the duties of the 'sentry' for two hours, which was the length of time each of the party was obliged to spend in protecting the camp, and for which we cast lots the evening before.

The 'sentry' was required to stoke the fire and keep his senses alert for the approach of elephants, particularly of a single bull. Also to listen to the sounds and cries of the night, from which his comrades would be able to learn what had happened in the forest while they slept. The offender who was caught dozing at his post not only became the butt of caustic comment, but was compelled to do a double duty the following night.

So imagine now that you are seated before this fire. You are in a glade of a great forest; towering trees surround you, clothed in a cloak of blackness broken by a thousand sparklers, the myriad tropical fireflies. Close your eyes and listen to my tales of tigers, of adventure and mystery, as the jungle breezes waft the night scent of the wild flowers on a cool current that fans your brow, and remember that you are in a land where time is of no consequence and the word 'hurry' is never spoken.

One

A Night in Spider Valley

ERIC NEWCOMBE, WHO FIGURES SO LARGELY IN THIS STORY, WAS AT school with me. We were great friends, and one of the reasons for this was that Eric had a very pretty sister.

Unfortunately, he was one of those people occasionally encountered who have an inevitable attraction for trouble. To make my meaning clear, if you were with Eric you could surely expect something unfortunate to happen. It was almost a certainty.

Sometime, as boys, we raided orchards, or we raided the girls' school at night, dressed as ghosts or Red Indians, or the dormitories of the convent, running the gauntlet of the nuns a dozen times; yet we always escaped, except when Eric was with us. For we tried it all again with him in the party. Dressed as 'yoemen' of old—Eric was 'Guy Fawkes', I remember—we had once terrified the girls in their beds at the convent and were making good our escape, pursued by various nuns with umbrellas, but vaulting over the wall to freedom, at whose feet do you think we fell? None other than our own headmaster, returning from a late night about which he was careful not to speak.

Eric was such a bumpkin that, not content with falling in love with a girl whose parents strongly disapproved, he had to fall off the wall he had climbed over in order to see her and to break his arm in the process. And when we were in pursuit of 'The Killer of Jalahalli', a panther that had been wounded, whose story I have already told* Eric, who was with me, had to go and get himself mauled. Not long

afterwards we visited a circus and Eric conceived the idea of stroking a panther in its cage. As might have been expected, the panther resented this familiarity and badly clawed his hand. I might mention that for both of these catastrophies I got all the blame from his wife, for he had married that girl some years after falling off the wall.

Then one night we went to shoot wild pig at Gulhatti. It poured with rain. We were sitting in a field for the pig, but I decided to give up and return to the forest bungalow. But not Eric. What was a little rain after all, he asked? He would bag a pig regardless. He got pneumonia instead, and his wife blamed me even for that!

I have told you about these incidents so that you might appreciate that I was not overenthusiastic when this Jonah suggested we do a night jaunt into the jungle in search of adventure. To ensure we met with excitement in some shape or form, he stressed we should go unarmed but should carry torches and a supply of food. That was something at least. He was such a crazy character that I would not have been surprised it the least had he made it mandatory that we went torchless and foodless as well.

Eric was very likeable, extremely persuasive, very fond of nature and the wild, quite unassuming and altogether irresponsible. He was quite unaware of the possible trouble that some of his actions could bring to him and his unfortunate companions. I am always game for an adventure, but when I realised it was to be in the company of this amiable character, I do confess I felt a considerable degree of doubt.

Those of you who have read of my adventures with the tiger I have called 'The Novice of Manchi'* and my earlier story about The Marauder of Kempekerai',** will remember the valley I have described in those stories and which I called 'Spider Valley'. It is a deep and densely forested valley in the district of Salem, extending southward for about twenty miles from a little hamlet named Aiyur and enclosed between two lofty mountain ranges.

This valley is the bed of a stream, and a narrow footpath accompanies the stream, crossing it every now and then as the stream turns to right and left in an attempt to shorten the overall distance. The mountain ranges to west and east tower above the valley bottom, sometimes oppressively close, giving the traveller the impression that he is in a leafy tunnel. A delightful forest lodge, known as the Kodekarai bungalow, on the slopes of the Gutherayan peak at a height of over 4,000 feet, and to the east of the valley, overlooks the scene as the stream and the valley struggle onward to their ultimate junction ten miles away with the Chinar river, itself a tributary of the great Cauvery river, which is the biggest in south India.

We chose 'Spider Valley' for *ghoom* (a Hindustani word signifying to 'wander' or 'stroll') for a variety of reasons. It was a very densely

forested area and abounded in those days with elephant, bison, tiger, panther and bear. Sambar and jungle-sheep, rather than spotted deer, were plentiful because of the hilly terrain and adjacent mountain ranges. Rock snakes, commonly termed pythons, were said to be present in numbers, and smaller animal life was abundant. The tall, waving bamboos and the damp undergrowth were the home of millions of fireflies as well as of a luminiscent beetle and three varieties of 'glow-worm'. Finally, I knew it to be the only area in Salem district where, by virtue of the dampness of the evergreen jungle, a hamadryad (king cobra) might be encountered.

In those early days I owned a fleet of Model T Fords, thirteen of them at one time in fact and all in running order. Purchased at various military auctions as scrap at prices ranging from Rs. 50/- to Rs.250 (£2.50 to £12.50), I tinkered with them and put them back upon the road for use on my trips to the jungle. The cheapest buy was an engine on its chassis and wheels for Rs.12 (about 60p.). Upon this chassis I fixed a body consisting of a dual-purpose box *machan* that could be rigged up on a tree or placed over a hole dug in the earth. Handles helped to fix this *machan* to a tree, while loopholes in the sides provided apertures for firing when it was employed to cover a pit dug in the ground. The whole contraption, as I have indicated, was clamped to the chassis of the model to form an inverted compartment in which to carry my tools, food, water and bedding. A comfortable cane chair, secured over the petrol tank, made a fine driving-seat. As for mudguards, there were none. Nor a windshield. A pair of dark glasses served to keep the grit out of my eyes.

It is true I was covered with dust by journey's end, or bespattered with mud on a rainy day, but this added to the fun. A companion, if there was one, would be seated on a similar cane chair to my left, and I would delight in driving the left front wheel of this vehicle very skilfully through pools of rainwater or heaps of cowdung, and laugh when he was showered with mud or worse.

Eric had a great liking for this vehicle which he called 'Sudden Death' and was adamant that we should make our journey in it, or rather on it, which would be a truer term, in preference to any of the other Model Ts.

I must tell you that it was, and still is, against the law to travel about on a chassis as a regular means of transport. The law requires that there must be a regular body of some sort on any vehicle. The question of registering 'Sudden Death' and obtaining a number for it had therefore to be solved. You will remember it was sold as scrap and had no number at the time. So I removed the numberplate from one of my other Model Ts and drove that vehicle down to the registration office for the needful action. On the application form that

had to be filled in was entered both the engine number and chassis number of 'Sudden Death'. The engine and chassis numbers of the vehicle used as a substitute were doctored with a coating of shellac which made them indecipherable; it could be removed later by scraping and a few drops of petrol. 'Sudden Death' was duly registered and given a new number. That, too, under its very own engine and chassis serial numbers. The law was powerless after that to prosecute me for driving about on a chassis that did not have a regular body, for the portable *machan* could not officially be regarded as such. The car that had been presented in its place resumed its own identity when its own number was put back after the shellac coating had been removed.

There were two other features about 'Sudden Death' which I have still to record. The first was that I have fitted it with a special carburettor—also picked up as scrap—which enabled me to start the engine on petrol, and switch to kerosene when it had heated up. A Model T. covered about twenty-four miles to the gallon. Petrol in those days cost fourteen *annas* per gallon (about £0.05), and kerosene 8 *annas* a gallon, or about half the price. So motoring on kerosene was economical indeed. Engine oil was 3½ Rs. or £0.20 a gallon, while brand new tyres were around Rs. 15 or £0.70 each.

The other feature of 'Sudden Death' was a Ruxtel back axle. This provided a very low and a very high gear, in addition to the two transmission gears operated by pedal on every Model T. 'Sudden Death' could, therefore, because of her 22 hp engine and light weight almost climb a wall, and on the flat she could nip along under kerosene at a speed that made many a new car look like a tortoise. As for a failing spark plug, I never bothered to carry a spare. Pending cleaning it when I had the time to do so, all that was required was removal from the cylinder head, for 'Sudden Death' would then snort along on three cylinders as if she had never had a fourth!

As we would be on the move all night, we planned to wear the lightest clothing, the proverbial khaki, while I donned the pair of knee-length, alpaca-lined, rubber-soled boots that I generally wore on such prowls. They are light, noiseless and soft, but thick enough to absorb the fangs of any Russell's viper or a cobra that might be lurking in the undergrowth and inadvertently stamped upon. Eric wore rubber-soled boots with the ends of his pants tucked into them. Snakes offer the greatest hazard at night, far greater than that of running into an elephant or a bear. Tigers and panthers, unless man-eaters, wounded or in the act of mating, offer practically no danger at all.

'Sudden Death' took us to the Aiyur Forest Lodge without incident. Here we had dinner. Then, carrying our food and a change of clothing in haversacks upon our backs, and a bag of spare torch-cells each, we set forth for Spider Valley, the best part of three miles away. I had a

five-cell torch hanging in a cloth case at my side while I used a three-cell torch, handier for spotting. Eric carried a pair of three-cell torches.

There is a fire-line leading through the forest in a southeasterly direction from the lodge. After nearly a mile this traverses the edge of a water hole, then changes direction westwards and after some time meets a track leading up a hill to another forest lodge at a place named Gulhatti.

At this water hole we had our first adventure. Our torches revealed a row of twin-pointed green lights on the opposite bank of the pool which kept bobbing up and down restlessly in an attempt to escape the unwinking stare of our torch-beams. A herd of spotted deer had been caught in the act of drinking!

I sank to my haunches to watch them, but Eric left the *path* we were following and moved down towards the water. This was a mistake, for his clothing got caught in the wait-a-bit thorns that clustered around the pool. Apart from scratching himself, he made quite a lot of noise and made yet another mistake. He moved into the beam from my torch, thereby revealing to the deer that the bright objects they had been staring at all this while, but could not quite identify, were connected with their deadliest enemy—man. With a drumming of hooves the herd disappeared like magic. But a far more ominous sound took its place.

'Woof! Woof! Woofl' A bear had come down to drink. And he, too, had done the unexpected thing.

He must have been moving along the very pathway we had been following and had decided to drink. So he went down to the pool just ahead of Eric. Being hard of hearing and poor of sight, the bear did not hear us at first, nor notice our torch-beams. Maybe he had his head down and was drinking. But when Eric began to crash about and show himself in my light, and the spotted deer thundered away in alarm, the bear realised that something was cooking and that something was directly behind him.

Like all his kind when they get alarmed, he did not wait to think. It did not even occur to him to run away. Instead, he rushed headlong at the intruder. Time enough for him to find out the nature of the intruder later. So he charged straight at Eric at top speed, and Eric at the moment was caught in the wait-a-bit thorns!

What did he do at this critical moment! He hurled his three-cell torch straight at the oncoming bear, then only a few feet away. Only he could have done such a thing.

Here was a bear coming hell for leather at the light when—behold! —the light came hell for leather at him! By luck the torch struck Bruin somewhere in the face, with the result that, as quickly as he had made

up his mind to charge, he now made up his mind to run away. Veering to his left he disappeared in a crashing of bushes and loud'Woofs!' Eric left the thorns with some of his clothing adhering there, rushed to where I stood rooted to the spot, and exclaimed 'A bear!'

I remained silent.

We turned due west for some time and then south along a much narrower track, which was the pathway we were to follow for twenty miles till it met the Chinar river. It led downhill and we entered Spider Valley. The vegetation grew densely on all sides; the lantana bushes, with their clusters of red, pink and orange-coloured flowers, visible in our torch-beams, were rapidly giving away to increasingly dense clumps of bamboo.

Then we heard the sound of elephants: a crash as one of these monsters tore down a culm of bamboo, followed by a curious 'wheenk' as the tender upper leaves and outer skins of which elephants are very fond were peeled off. Finally the thicker base stem was cast away. Truly wasteful creatures they are; for the sake of a basketful of tender leaves and skin, a whole massive culm had been destroyed.

Was this animal alone, or was there a whole herd grazing at the head of the valley for which we were making? We squatted on the ground to await further evidence, and for a while there was absolute silence. Then we heard the swishing as the elephant beat upon the ground a bunch of leaves that he had gathered at the end of his trunk preparatory to stuffing the whole lot into his mouth.

Then silence again, but not for long: 'Phutt! Phutt! Phutt! Phutt!', followed by a prolonged 'whooshing' sound.

He was closer to us than we had thought for these sounds revealed that he was answering the call of nature. It was also becoming apparent that he was probably alone.

He was directly ahead of us and the breeze was blowing from us in his direction, so that it could only be a matter of minutes, if not seconds, before he caught our scent. Then one of three things might happen.

Normally he should just have melted away into the jungle as elephants have a habit of doing, regardless of their great bulk, when they get scent of man. On the other hand he might stand absolutely still, as motionless as a rock, hoping that we might either pass him by without noticing his presence, or if he was on mischief bent, to allow us to come close enough to enable him to charge down upon us devastatingly. The third, but most improbable alternative, was to charge us without further ado. Elephants, even when in *musth* or in any other irritable mood, are unlikely to do this. The majority think things over for a minute or two before acting.

I was about to grab Eric and move off to the left to start a long

detour in order to avoid the creature when a fresh sound came to our ears: 'Quink! Quink! Quink!' The sound of a baby elephant nuzzling up to its mother.

We now knew we were in far less danger: unless one gets too close to such a baby, a herd will generally avoid human beings. It is the solitary elephant one has to be careful of.

At least, that was the way things ought to have gone.

But there were other factors. For one thing, it was night; for another, the beams from our torches would frighten the elephants, even annoy them. We had deliberately chosen a dark night, for although the jungle looks pleasantly ethereal in the moonlight, to move about in such light gives one's position away far sooner than in real darkness. Further, our torch-beams would not carry very far in moonlight and the reflection of the eyes of an animal would be far weaker than in pitch darkness.

We had already agreed to talk as little as possible, so I extinguished my torch and with my free hand reached out to grasp and turn off Eric's too. For a moment the darkness was intense, then as our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, the darkness softened and the glitter of the stars added considerable illumination to our surroundings.

The silence continued to be intense. It became oppressive. It got on our nerves. Eventually it became ominous as we began to feel we were being watched.

A low and continued rumbling like distant thunder came from our right. But the sky was clear and star-spangled, so the noise could not possibly herald rain. Where did it come from?

Eric was staring hard to the right as we heard the rumbling again. I could see he was a little alarmed. Finally he put his lips to my ear and asked in a whisper, 'Do you hear that? Can it be a tiger?'

I raised my finger to my mouth to enjoin silence, rubbed my stomach with my other hand, and stabbed my forefinger in the direction where we had first heard the elephants. The starlight was bright enough for us to see each other and Eric recognised my action. I was trying to tell him that the rumbling sound came from the digestive processes of an elephant's stomach.

There are five fundamental lessons a night-prowler should learn if he hopes to prowl with success, whether 'ghooming' like ourselves or reconnoitring the front lines of an 'enemy'. The first is not to talk, or even whisper, on any account. The second is to 'freeze' at sight or sound of an animal or an enemy as the case may be. The third is to keep to the shadows and avoid crossing open spaces. The fourth is to be careful where you place your foot, for even if it is too dark to see, taking a false step into thorns or causing the dried leaves to rustle,

will give away your position. You must cultivate the habit on these occasions of moving each foot forward in the manner of soldiers on a ceremonial slow-step parade rather than raising the knee and bringing the foot downwards, as in normal walking. Of course, this requires a little practice, but more than that it needs conscious forethought, remembering to use the 'glide-step' in a night-time *ghoom* rather than lapsing forgetfully into your ordinary walk.

The fifth and least thing to remember at all times, especially when you 'freeze', is to 'freeze' literally and not keep fidgeting about, slapping at mosquitoes, scratching, raising your hands to your face, and such-like actions.

You should never forget that the faintest whisper becomes audible in the still night air, while the slightest motion attracts the attention of an alert animal, or an enemy, as the case may be, and will give you away. Bear these five tips in mind always if you have occasion to go out on a night '*ghoom*', or under different circumstances if you don't want to invite an enemy bullet in your direction. Eric had broken the very first of them by whispering to me and the nearest elephant had heard him.

An instant later there came an earth-shaking 'Tri-aa-ank! Tri-aa-ank'—the alarm cry of a frightened female.

These huge creatures are almost unpredictable. You can never say how they may react even under exactly similar circumstances, though with a wide experience of them in the wild, I can say that usually, under certain conditions, you may expect one of them to behave in this way or that.

After that alarm call, pandemonium reigned for a short time. Then followed a chorus of cries from all around us: 'Kakk! Kakk! Kakk!' as mothers summoned their young peremptorily, accompanied by 'Quink! Quink! Quink!' as a dozen baby-elephants hurried to shelter beneath their mothers' bellies. What was more frightening was a prolonged roar from the streambed now only a few yards in front of us.

'Ahha-a-a-a-a-ah!Ahha-a-a-a-a-ah!' A bull-elephant, probably the master of the herd, had herd the alarm signal of his mates; he cried his reassurance as he hurried to their aid, while another male, this time to our left but further off also answered with a roar. Then the first bull, coming headlong toward us, splashed through the water. We heard the squelching as he hurried across the stream, roaring as he came.

We were unarmed, remember, and on foot. I grabbed Eric by the elbow. We turned and scurried back along the *path*. No time, now, for cautious walking. Rather, we broke into a jog trot.

Meanwhile the bull behind us, still roaring, rejoined the females who had raised the first alarm. He had stopped roaring now. Only the

squeals and squeaks of the young and the coughing 'Kakk! Kakk!' calls of summoning mothers could be heard. The second bull, who had also been roaring, had probably joined them as well, for his roars stopped too.

If either or both the bulls decided to chase us now, as likely as not they would start off in silence and only give vent to the shrieking trumpet-sound of attack when they actually saw or scented us. This would be quite different in timbre from the shrill cry of fear and alarm first voiced by the frightened cow. The attacking note is pitched higher and is more prolonged. There is no mistaking the quality of hatred, anger and menace that is put into such a sound, while the alarm-cry is lower-pitched and of shorter, quicker duration, rarely voiced more than twice in succession.

Instead, we heard crashing sounds which seemed to be receding behind us. The 'quicks' of the young had stopped. Evidently the leader had decided that discretion was the better part of valour and was taking his charges away. Now numerous splashings announced that the animals were crossing the stream. We stopped running and sat down to listen.

A few moments later complete silence reigned except for a distant 'Ponk! Ponk! Ponk!' as a sambar doe, high up on a hillside to our right, who had heard all the commotion below, decided some danger might be afoot and voiced her own alarm.

Eric brought his lips to my ear again and whispered 'what now?'

I shrugged, held up the palm of a hand to signify we should wait a little and then, by pointing my forefinger down into the valley, indicated that we would continue our journey. Eric saw my point. Having started, we were not going back just for the sake of a few elephants.

We waited perhaps fifteen minutes to allow the herd to move out of the way. Then we got up and continued our cautious progress down the valley. Very soon we reached the stream. It was perhaps twenty yards wide at this spot. The water reached almost from bank to bank, which accounted for the great amount of splashing we heard when the elephants crossed over, but it was barely knee-deep, as we found out for ourselves when we followed the *path* which cut across the stream for the first time.

The undergrowth on the farther bank was very dense. There was less lantana here and a great deal of *vellari* shrubbery in its place, while mighty trees with trunks of great girth met overhead, their branches crowding and completely obscuring the starlight. Bamboos in profusion grew in massive clumps on both banks of the stream.

The darkness was stygian and a high breeze, which had just risen, blowing down the valley from behind us, caused the bamboos to creak

and groan and their culms to bend and thrash wildly against one another. This breeze was unfortunate; we did not like it at all. Coming from behind, it would spread our scent far and wide and warn the animals ahead of our approach. Carnivora have a very poor sense of smell, so it hardly mattered as far as they were concerned, but deer and elephant would know we were coming long in advance of our arrival. We would not see many of the former, while the latter, unless on mischief bent, would give us a wide berth. At the same time, the noise made by the breeze filled the air and prevented us from hearing anything else.

I walked ahead, flashing my three-cell, while Eric followed closely. I had cautioned him not to use his torch, as its beams would fall upon myself and advertise my presence. Further, the light of a second torch from behind is very distracting to the person in front, for various reasons.

The elephant herd had taken itself off in some other direction, and for the time being, at least, there was neither sight nor sound of them, although we found ample evidence of their recent presence in the valley in the form of broken branches, chewed fragments of bamboo, and huge balls of dung all over the pathway.

A moment later something sticky and clammy clung to my face. I could not see it although my torch was lit. Then I recognised what it was: I had walked into the web of one of those enormous spiders that live in large numbers in this valley, and for which reason I had called it 'Spider Valley'. These spiders are huge, often measuring as much as ten inches from leg-tip to leg-tip across the body. This one was not great in bulk, however; it was perhaps the size of a large marble. The abdomen and thorax were black with vivid stripes of yellow running around and across. The eyes were large and blood-red and reflected torchlight as if two large rubies were hanging side by side in midair. The legs were long, hairless, black and powerful, as if made of wire.

I had watched these creatures spinning their webs in daylight. They climb to a high branch and from there they let themselves drop, emitting a thread behind them. When they judge they have fallen far enough, they control any further fall by the simple expedient of not emitting further thread. In this position, head downwards, they hang till a gust of breeze blows the thread close enough to some leaf or branch, to which they immediately cling and attach the thread. If no breeze comes within an appreciable time, the spider climbs up the line of web thread by which it has descended, and tries all over again from a more advantageous position.

Having secured the first line of its thread as a sort of bridgehead, it climbs to the top of this second tree and repeats the action by dropping itself from there while adjusting the length of thread emitted

from its abdomen till it meets the first line of web, to which it attaches this new strand. Waiting for the breeze again, it drops lower to reach some point a few feet off the ground and a little distance from the first tree from which it began its operation.

The spider has now spun a huge X, extending some fifteen to twenty feet across. It now returns to the point it had started from and begins to connect all four corners of the letter X to each other by running up and down the arms of the letter X until it has made a huge rectangle with the X in the centre.

The rest is simple; the spider moves around and around, weaving strands of web in parallel lines all around, and perhaps half-an-inch from each other. All this is mighty hard work, but the spider I watched one morning, just starting work on its web as I walked down this valley, had finished by the time I returned that way late the same evening: a wonderful exhibition of precision engineering for an insect of its size.

These creatures will devour anything that gets caught in their webs, butterflies, moths, beetles, and even the smaller species of birds whose blood it consumes. The strands of its webs, although no thicker than the finest thread are very elastic and incredibly strong. Even a single strand will not break easily under strain. Moreover, the substance that forms this strand is very sticky.

Once the work is done, the spider takes up its position in the centre of the web with its legs outstretched. In this position, due to its colouring, it looks like some leaf-stem or other insignificant object suspended in midair. It hangs motionless, but entirely alert. As soon as some creature flies inadvertently against the web, the sticky substance of which the strands are made adhere to it. The creature flutters and struggles, thus fouling other sticky strands.

Immediately, the spider in the middle of the web comes to life. It scurries towards its prey and scampers swiftly round and round it, emitting an endless flow of threads until the prey is entirely encased and enmeshed.

Then comes the final sad scene. The spider approaches its helpless victim, bites it and starts sucking out all its blood and body-juices, growing fatter and fatter itself in the process till frequently it more than doubles its own size. The prey, on the other hand, collapses as an empty bag of outer skin or as an empty shell, should the victim happen to be a beetle. When all is over, the spider repairs the damage done to its web in the struggle; it does this at once, without postponing the work till some future opportunity. Then it returns to its position in the centre, pending the arrival of its next victim. Spiders are voracious and seem to possess an insatiable appetite.

This spider is very pugnacious and will fight to the death against

any one of its own kind who attempts to tresspass into its web. I witnessed this for myself years ago, when I deliberately placed, one of these spiders upon the web of a companion of the same species. A battle royal ensued, in the process of which legs were quickly torn off each combatant. The tresspaser lost in the end, after five of its legs had been bitten off by the spider who owned the web and who had lost two of its own legs in the battle. Those that remained, however, were enough to enmesh the trespasser securely in a ball of webbing, then came the *coup de grace*, the blood-sucking process, at which stage I ended my observations.

I brushed the web from my face and continued on our way. The *path* became narrower and the forest on both sides became dense. My torch-beam danced from one grey tree-trunk to the next; the moss and lichens that covered them looked like the beards of thousands of old men hanging to the ground.

Suddenly a stillness fell upon the jungle, a hush that could be felt as well as heard. Eric observed it, too, and quickened his steps. His toes kicked against my heels and he involuntarily touched my elbow. I halted in my tracks and he bumped into me. I extinguished the torch and sank down upon my haunches. In a jungle, the closer one can get to the ground, the better one can hear. For a moment Eric wondered where I was and groped with his hands in the darkness about me. Then he whispered 'Scotchie?'

It is a nickname by which I was known at school, though I rarely hear it today. My old schoolpals have practically disappeared. Many have gone abroad, while a large number have made the last journey we all must make. The thought makes me feel lonely at times.

I wondered what could be the cause of that hush, that almost palpable silence that hung so heavily about us. Reason told me there might be many explanations. The sudden cutting-off of the breeze that was blowing all this while from behind us by some hilly spur that we had circumvented in the darkness; an opposing breeze, blowing northwards up the great rift yawned before us in the night; a hush before a storm, a moment when all Nature appears to hold her breath in preparation for the fast approaching tempest.

The darkness was intense and there was no break in the gloom, even when I gazed upwards the tree-tops were lost in obscurity and the stars that until a few moment ago were visible here and there through the canopy of leaves were now completely obliterated. That was when I came to know the reason for the strange silence that had fallen all around us. Indeed, a storm was approaching!

To witness such a phenomenon in the tropics is unforgettable, whether on land or at sea; but to have to undergo it upon the ground in a dense forest is hardly an enviable prospect. People sometimes run

under a tree to shelter from the rain, but that is not the kind of rain we have in India, particularly in the jungles, and it certainly was no safe place when the tree itself might be split in two by lightning or torn up by the roots in the wind.

A moment later came a vivid flash overhead. It seemed to rend the canopy of the tree-tops and scatter the darkness with a single blaze of ethereal light. The heart of the storm was so close that it seemed but a fraction of a second before the thunderclap followed in an outrageous, monstrous roar, as of thousand cannon firing in unison. The earth upon which we stood shuddered and the overhanging foliage quivered with the resonance of the thunder; the very universe seemed to tremble.

There was nothing to do but crouch close to the ground. To remain standing is to invite injury from falling branches. Together we scrambled towards the trunk of a nearby tree. I made certain it was one of medium height and not one of the greater specimens whose top would reach to the upper trellises of the jungle, for the loftier the tree the more it would present itself as a target for the lightning which, in violent electrical storms of this kind, can be expected to strike at any moment.

The hush and the darkness returned, but not for long. There was another, more intense flash, followed by an even louder clap of thunder. The third flash was not a flash at all. Like a great serpent of fire from the sky, the lightning struck a giant tree somewhere in the jungle and the thunder that followed seemed to burst our eardrums and numb us with its intensity.

The next moment we heard a mighty, rushing uproar approaching towards us up the valley, like a hundred breakers in unison dashing upon a rocky beach. This was the wind and as it came closer one gained the impression that the trees of the forest were bracing themselves for the onslaught.

It was almost upon us now, and together with this fearsome, roaring sound we heard the staccato reports of hundreds of branches as they snapped like matchwood in the irresistible squall. Above the rushing of the wind we heard the louder thudding and crashing of falling branches and trees, and the creaking, tearing, and rending of timber. Here and there, trees of outstanding height or bulk, by reason of their top-weight and resistance to the wind, were uprooted from the earth and fell with resounding crashes, bringing down a host of minor trees and saplings that were unlucky enough to be sheltering below.

The gale continued for a few minutes only then passed as suddenly as it had begun. The trees lifted themselves again, many of them bereft of half their foliage. All was quiet for a short while except for the diminishing roar of the wind as it receded up the valley.

A new sound soon became audible, growing rapidly in intensity as it drew nearer: a continuous, hissing noise like escaping steam. The rain.

Now it was upon us. What was dry ground and foliage a moment earlier was in the twinkling of an eye converted into a sodden morass of mud and greenery. The best of umbrellas and raincoats would be of no avail in a downpour of this intensity, and we were carrying no umbrellas or raincoats anyway. Not only were we soaked to the skin, but the little equipment and food on our backs was equally saturated. Water poured down our bodies and flowed down our pants, filling our shoes, including my prized alpaca-lined boots, to the brim. This footwear was sold under a guarantee of being waterproof. It now proved the merit of that advertisement, but in an inverse manner. The water that had filled it remained where it was and refused to leak out.

The rain went on and on.

The little stream which was wont to purl and ripple over smooth, mossy stones as it meandered hither and thither, gliding down its course, did none of these nice things any longer. It dashed, lashed and smashed against the rocks in its course, accompanied by a thudding and grinding of torn branches and tree-trunks that were swept down by the flood. The water rose higher and covered the rocks and boulders that obstructed its *path* it became a raging, unbroken flow, crested by the flotsam and jetsam that was whirled and tossed helplessly in the mad grip of the swirling flood.

The ground upon which we were standing was a foot deep in mud and there was not the slightest indication of the rain abating. But it lasted only a little more than an hour, and then it passed as swiftly as its precursor, the wind.

There were a million noises around us now, the dripping from the leaves, the gurgling rush of the stream, the frequent 'plop' from its banks as large section of earth, soaked by the rain and undermined by the raging torrent, collapsed into the flood.

We felt very miserable indeed. Unspoken thoughts turned to home, the comfort of bed and warm blankets, a steaming cup of tea, a relaxing pipe and a good book. What insane idea ever impelled us to start on a trip like this and place ourselves in such a predicament? Then recriminations passed. We forced ourselves to smile and begin to think what we should do next. We could only go back or press on. And who would think seriously of going back?

One thing was certain: we could not continue in our sodden clothing. As evaporation set in, our garments would grow colder and colder upon our bodies. Without clothes we could feel cold, admittedly, but at least we would not grow colder. However logical or illogical this argument might seem, we divested ourselves entirely,

poured the water from our boots and put them on again. Our wet clothes we. secured to pieces of bamboo, which we shouldered in addition to our kit.

Now we were ready to continue but far from comfortable, I can assure you. The bamboo dug itself into the flesh and the straps of our kitbags dug in too; thorns scraped our skins and our bare feet flopped about loosely in our boots; moreover, it was midnight and very cold.

Soon another hazard presented itself. We found ourselves slipping and slithering in the mud and ooze. The noise we were making by floundering along the soaked pathway and against the undergrowth on both sides of it would advertise our movements in the jungle for a furlong around. In any event, few animals would be on the move after the heavy downpour. Even the elephants would be inclined to call it a day—or rather, a night—and huddle together in some sheltered spot. Every creature would lie quiet; that is, every creature but the snakes! They would be up and about, hunting and gorging themselves upon the frogs that were making this night an occasion for rejoicing.

All around us we could hear these creatures croaking, particularly along the banks of the swollen stream. 'Korr! Korr! Korr! Quacker! Quacker! Quacker!' came the sound from a thousand bull-frog throats. The air droned with the noise. It vibrated and pulsated to the chorus of joy voiced by what was obviously the whole frog-population of the Spider Valley.

For this was mating time, and the forest floor was littered with squashy, lovemaking couples upon which we could not avoid treading in the darkness.

For a moment I caught a glimpse of something white in the middle of the *path*. Then it was gone. Again it appeared briefly and then disappeared once more. I could see the ground where it vanished and got the impression of movement, although I could not recognise what it was.

I came to a stop and directed the torch-beam steadily upon the movement. Eric halted behind me. For a few seconds I could not make out what lay on the pathway, then I knew what it was: a snake!

I increased my pace, motioning to Eric to remain where he was. Snakes have no ears, but they make up for lack of hearing by an acute sense of feeling. Through the scale upon their bellies that rest against the ground they are able to sense danger from anything that moves by detecting the vibration caused by that movement.

The boots I was wearing had soft rubber soles and I was able to approach relatively undetected. The beam of my torch was directed upon the reptile but it did not appear to be disturbed. Coming from behind, the source of the torchlight was beyond the range of the snake's vision. Snakes' eyes are lidless and fixed, and cannot turn

sideways or backwards. Nor did my approach register itself upon the reptile's brain which, at the moment, was completely engrossed upon the work in hand, the swallowing of a very large bull-frog in one piece.

I was close enough now to make out the details. The snake's jaws, not being hinged together, were distended grotesquely and the gullet swollen out of all proportion. The head and one foreleg of the unfortunate frog had already disappeared down this passage, while the other three legs and the body hung limply outside. Normally, the creature should be kicking and struggling desperately to escape, but this frog was quite dead, and the reason was apparent. The snake was a cobra. The venom had killed the frog in a few seconds.

The cobra had not raised its hood in either alarm or anger, for it was still unaware of my approach, but the bulk of the bull-frog already in its gullet had sufficiently expanded the skin in the region to show up the characteristic V-mark. I was an ardent collector of snakes at that time, and the specimen before me was of outsize dimensions. I decided to catch it.

Unfortunately, the thick cloth bag I had brought for just such a purpose was with the kitbag on my back. I had to lay down the bamboo and my wet clothes before I could remove the kitbag from my back, and in all this movement the cobra became aware of our presence. It ejected the, frog it had half-swallowed, turned around to face me and raised its hood, trembling with fury.

It was a magnificent specimen, but it would slither away in another second if I failed to put it into a fighting mood, so to do this I stamped my foot heavily upon the ground a couple of feet away. The cobra responded by raising itself still higher and then struck the ground at the spot where my foot had been but a moment before.

Meanwhile I was working feverishly to get the kitbag off my shoulders, unfasten the zip and grope with my hand amongst the many miscellaneous items in search of that snake-bag. The operation took a long time. The outside of the bag was soaking wet for one thing and I was working with one hand, unable to look for the bag as I had to keep my eyes fixed upon the cobra.

At last I found it, pulled it out quickly and advanced towards the snake, which turned itself fully around to face me.

Catching a cobra is really very easy once you rivet its attention. It is only when the reptile is in rapid motion that the operation becomes difficult and entails considerable risk. In this instance, I stretched out my right hand, holding the cloth bag by its handle close to the snake's head. It quivered with fury, hissed loudly, and lunged at the bag. That is when I withdrew the bag so that the cobra, with hood fully distended, struck its head upon the ground for the second time.

One has to be quick at this moment, but there is really nothing to it. The quickness of action comes with practice. The length of bamboo on which I had slung my wet clothes was in my left hand. It came in handy now. I quickly pressed down upon the snake's neck, behind its head and above the hood, with the end of this bamboo about six inches from its tip. The ground was wet, so I had to be careful not to allow the head to slip free. Eric was to be of no assistance to me. I saw that he had retired a good ten yards away. I called to him urgently to come and hold my torch. He advanced reluctantly and took it from me.

'Hold the light steady,' I admonished. Then I stooped down, dropped the cloth bag and grasped the snake behind its neck with the thumb and forefinger of my right hand. Then I removed the bamboo. The snake coiled itself around my hand and forearm, but I uncoiled it with my left hand while urging Eric to pick up the bag.

He hesitated and I repeated, 'Hurry up; pick it up and open it.'

It seemed to me as if Eric was taking a terribly long time to do just this, but eventually the bag was held in position and I forced the coils of the snake into it. Lastly I thrust the head inside, keeping the fingers of my left hand around the neck of the bag, released the snake's head and jerked my right hand out of the bag very quickly. Almost in one motion, I closed the neck of the bag with the fingers and thumb of my left hand.

That is all there is to catching a cobra. Some people have told me that it calls for nerve. Don't you believe that. In my opinion, it is just the opposite. There should be 'no nerve', or as few as possible. For if there are nerves, the snake-catcher may not be able to catch his snake. Worse still, he may hesitate in the middle of the operation, and that would be just too bad for him! The snake would catch him then with a bite upon his finger or hand.

I took care to tie up the neck of the bag very firmly and then thrust it back into my kitbag. A few minutes later we were on our way again.

For the next thirty minutes or so our discomfort increased because of the wet and cold. It would have been nice to stop and light a fire to dry our clothing and ourselves, but the whole jungle was sodden and such an operation was out of the question. However we were young and ardently keen upon adventure. Mind conquers such obstacles and we pressed on forgetful of our physical discomfort. Except for encountering the elephants at the head of the valley, we had had no fun and we were longing for something to happen.

The stream began to flow rapidly now among steep rocks; the ground became hard and the trees and bamboos were shorter and more sparse. Larger expanses of sky were visible, and we noticed that the clouds had cleared. Myriads of stars hung over us and shone

brightly.

The parallel ranges of mountains to the right and left of us, as we walked southwards, corresponded respectively to the western and eastern banks of the stream. Now we observed that they seemed to be converging upon each other while the valley narrowed to the proportions of a ravine. We could see the dark, unbroken outline of ridges and mountaintops on both sides as they towered upwards into the star-bedecked sky.

'Ayngh! Aa-u-ung! Oo-ooo ngh! Oo-ooo-ngh! Ooo-ooo-ooongh!'

We stopped in our tracks as we recognised that awesome sound. The canyon in which we were standing reverberated.

It was the call of the tiger! The animal was to our left and close ahead. It had come down the eastern range and was about to cross the stream. We extinguished our torches and hurried forwards to try to intercept it.

'Ugh! Ugh! Ugha!Ugha! Oooo-h! Ooo-h! Ooo-ooo-nigh! Aungh-ha! Ugh!Ugh'!

The call was almost continuous now. The tiger was being very noisy. Was this a sign of impatience? I seemed to detect an imperious note. Then remembered that this was the month of February. Rather late in February, admittedly, but nevertheless February still—the mating season or the tail end of it!

Here was the explanation of the prolonged semi-roars we were hearing. The beast was no tiger but a tigress. She was calling for a mate, and a tigress in this mood is not a very desirable creature to meet when unarmed.

As I have mentioned on many occasions, tigers are generally quite safe to meet, even when one is unarmed, with three exceptions—a man-eater, a wounded tiger, or a tiger in the mood for mating or in the act of mating. None of these conditions were literally fulfilled at that moment, but the third condition was very near.

The tigress continued her calling. She was but a short distance ahead now and still on our side of the stream. We were hurrying along that same bank. The stream was to our right. The flood water caused by the recent storm had abated considerably, but the stream must have been three or four feet deep at least. It the tigress intended to cross, she would have to swim.

As a rule tigers like water. Particularly in the hotter forests of Andhra Pradesh, I have come across them lying in shady pools to cool themselves when the temperature had reached over 110 degrees in the shade. But it was rather doubtful if this tigress would trust herself to cross the stream which was still foaming and frothing with the extra water fed to it from a myriad trickles reaching it from the forest on both sides.

At that moment my conjectures were interrupted by a fresh sound: 'Wrr-ung!Ar-ung! Arr-ungh! Oo-ooon!'

It was louder by far than the noise made by the tigress and the roar of water besides.

A tiger! He had heard and answered the call of a mate. The tigress heard it too. She answered with a loud 'Ugh! Ahha-ha-ha-ha!' of delight.

We were still in darkness. To flash our torches now would make our presence known. Most probably both tigers would disappear, unless they actively resented our company. Things would not be so pleasant then. But if we remained in darkness our presence would probably not be detected, as tigers have no sense of smell, while the noise of the stream would muffle any noise we might inadvertently make.

Our eyes had accustomed themselves to the starlight as we came to a halt and stood behind a tree that bordered the track. A few feet to our right was the bank of the stream. Beyond that and to our left, the jungle was a wall of darkness lit by a thousand flickering, moving lights, the fireflies that dart to and fro in ceaseless motion. The tumbling waters reflected countless stars, and here and there we could make out the darker forms of bushes or clumps of coarse grass on the bank. Of movement of any kind, we could see nothing.

Both tigers had now stopped calling. For them to meet, one or the other would have to ford the stream that lay between. The question was, which would be the one to cross? If the tigress crossed, we would be safe. If the tiger came over, both animals would be very close to us and would certainly resent our presence if they detected us.

The tigress clinched the matter by calling once more. This time she was almost mewing, like a very gruff and hoarse cat. Like all females in her circumstances, she was revelling in her position of advantage and was enticing the male to come to her; she would not condescend to go to him. Would the tiger be able to resist such a temptation?

He roared and roared again. It was a roar of defiance and challenge at the same time. Clearly he was warning all other tigers to keep away from his newly-founded mate. The tigress, still on our bank, continued her enticing mewing.

As I expected, the tiger could resist no longer. A long, dark silhouette emerged from the black wall of forest on the other bank, hesitated for a few seconds and then slid into the water of the stream.

I have already said that this watercourse is neither broad nor deep and it took him a very short time to cross. The silhouette became a solid grey form as he waded and then walked ashore, perhaps some fifty yards away.

All this while the tigress had not revealed herself. She now broke

cover with a bound, herself another grey shape, leaped forward to meet the tiger with a loud growl and reared up on her hind legs to slap him across his neck. The mock-fighting in which mating tigers indulge was about to begin. Neither animal intends to hurt the other, but frequently during this fighting, through excitement or a stray bite or scratch, tempers run high and the tigress invariably gets really rough. The tiger tolerates a lot until she at last goes too far. Then he loses his temper and sets about her in real earnest.

Both animals can be badly scratched and bitten and bleed freely by the time the repeated mating is over, but both animals appear to revel in the routine, soon forget their differences and cling together as a couple till the cubs are about to be born, at which time the tigress will separate herself from her lord for a while through fear that he might devour the cubs. Thereafter they will rejoin for maybe a year, along with their cubs, when they will part to seek fresh mates with the next season, approximately two years after the last, although the cubs sometimes remain with their mother for a few months more.

We had lost our chance of beating a retreat while the going was good before the tiger crossed the stream. Now that he was only a few yards away, and moreover because the tigress was with him, the slightest movement on our part would betray our presence to one or both the animals. If that should happen, our extinction was more than probable as both the felines, and particularly the male would not tolerate our eavesdropping on their lovemaking. It is equally likely that the tigress, in the excitement of mating, would resent our presence. It was too late now, anyway, to do anything about it. The only course open to us was to sink down to earth behind the tree-trunk that hid us and hope that the mating animals would not move in our direction.

For the next hour we were compelled to listen to a pandemonium of grunts, snarls, roars, prolonged mewing and a medley of other noises as the two animals pursued their lovemaking, the sounds differing in accordance with their mood and temper at each moment. As the mating progressed to reach climax, the loveplay became rougher and rougher, until it reached a point when they were almost fighting each other tooth and nail. In mating the tiger bites the female in the neck and literally holds her down. They then separate a while and rest before starting all over again.

Several times, in the course of their gambols and struggles, they dashed hither and thither, on more than one occasion coming within ten yards of us. Occasionally, we thought we were discovered and prepared to make a dash for it, although we knew such a step would only hasten our destruction. The tree that hid us was too thick to climb, and the next was twenty feet away, but we could not climb it

together. The first to reach it might possibly escape, provided the tigers did not follow him up, but the second man would be doomed. So we stayed where we were.

Finally the two felines tired of their efforts. The tigress curled up to rest like a cat, while the tiger sat on his haunches beside her to recuperate. And we wondered if they would never go away.

The placid scene was broken by a roar from the further bank. Another tiger, a male, had heard the sounds of revel and had come to see if there was chance to join in. The first tiger at once sprang to his feet to give an answering roar in challenge to the newcomer. The tigress uncurled herself, stood on her four legs twitched her tail from side to side, and then settled down on her haunches. Clearly she was enjoying the situation, no doubt extremely pleased with herself at the prospect of two males about to engage in a titanic contest on her account.

The tiger on the further bank answered the challenge with roars of his own. Then he broke cover and stood revealed. Now the two males faced each other, the stream between them. The tigress, upon her haunches still, snarled mildly, mewed and almost purred in glee. It was obvious she was enjoying herself. This provoked the first tiger beyond endurance. Coughing a loud 'Whoff! Whoff! Whoff!,' he entered the stream and rushed at his rival. The level of the water appeared to have dropped appreciably, for this time he was able to wade the whole distance.

The challenger awaited his coming, coughing and roaring. The first tiger reached the other bank, crouched low for a moment, and then hurled himself at his rival.

But something quite unexpected happened at the last moment. All this while the newcomer had given every indication that he was prepared to stand and do battle for the handsome female across the stream, but as her first lover crouched for his final spring, his courage turned to water. He whirled around and bolted for dear life. Seeing this and gathering momentum the first tiger charged after him with a series of victorious roars.

The female on our bank, disappointed that there was not going to be a fight for her favours, but anxious now to endear herself to her lord, coughed once and galloped across the stream to follow the two males that had vanished into the blackness of the jungle.

At that Eric and I lost no time. We raced away to get out of the vicinity of the three tigers and leave them to settle their lovemaking problems. We stumbled along through the gloom for the best part of half a mile before we risked switching on our torches again, for we did not dare to attract the attention of the three animals who had gone up the rising ground across the stream and might return at any moment.

From the contours of the surrounding mountains as silhouetted against the sky, I knew we were approaching the hamlet of Kempekerai. It was here that I shot the tiger I called the 'Novice of Manchi'. At this point the pathway we were following crossed the stream and we waded through the water which now reached just above our knees. The track leads up a slope to the hamlet, and we followed it till we reached the mud-wattle huts of Kempekerai.

A cur barked but none of the inmates bothered to stir, and it was only after repeated calling that a very tousled and sleepy head was thrust from a slightly-opened doorway. The half-closed eyes blinked in the glare of my torch. The head and eyes were those of my old friend Byra the Poojaree, of whom I have told you in other stories. For the greater part of the year this man lived with his wife and children almost stark naked in a burrow called 'gavvies' excavated in the steep banks of the Chinar river. When the rains came and the Chinar rose and the earth of the 'gavvies' turned too soft and was liable to collapse and close the burrow in which they lived, the whole family took service as cattle-grazers under some rich agriculturist, who sent his herd of cattle into the reserved forests to graze upon the long grass that spring up after the rains.

The agriculturist had to pay in licence to the government for grazing his cattle. In those days this fee was four *annas* (a fraction below four pence) per head for the whole period of five months grazing. The usual procedure was to buy a licence for about fifty head of cattle, paying the government twelve-and-a-half rupees as grazing fee (at the rate of sixteen *annas* to the rupee), but to drive anything up to 200 head—or even more—into the forest. A small gratuity of five rupees to the forest guard would cover the grazing fee for the remaining 150 unlicensed animals.

To look after these 200 beasts, Byra and his family would have to build what was called a *patti*, which was nothing more than a small clearing in the jungle. A smaller circular fence of thorns was constructed within this clearing for actually sheltering the cattle from wild animals at night. It was in the style of the African 'boma', with the difference that, as there are no lions in south India, the thorn fence would not be more than a yard in height and not very thick either. Tigers and panthers are not given to vaulting over thorn fences and carrying off their prey, as are the more daring lions of Africa that hunt in groups.

The hamlet of Kempekerai was nothing more than a multiple cattle *patti*, accommodating not only Byra and his family but a number of other families as well, all of them engaged in looking after different herds of cattle belonging to different owners. As a result, the animals actually in residence at any of these multiple *pattis* exceeded, by at

least five times, the stipulated number of cattle permitted to graze in that area under licence from the forest department; the government got less than one-fifth of the revenue in cattle-licences that it should have collected; the forest guard received an amount in bribes at least equal to, if not more than, his official salary; the owners of the herds had made a good arrangement; the grass, shrubs and the saplings of certain varieties of succulent trees were eaten down and destroyed over a large area of forest; the deer suffered by losing that amount of grazing; 'foot-and-mouth' disease, rife among village cattle, spread and decimated the deer, bison and wild boar in the jungle; and everybody was happy, including the tigers and panthers in the area, who with easier hunting got a good deal more to eat, preying upon the domestic herds. Happiest of all were the jackals, hyaenas and vultures that ate the cattle that died, whether by disease or by being killed by other wild animals.

This is indeed a true picture of the state of affairs in those good old days till a certain deadly poison was introduced as an insecticide by the government and made available to farmers, almost free of charge, to protect the crops from insect pests.

Some peasant then discovered that the insecticide, intended to kill caterpillars, beetles and other such pests, would also kill tigers and panthers that preyed upon the domestic herds and, far more important, unwanted mothers-in-law, brother-in-law, in fact all 'in-laws' of both sexes and all ages with happy impartiality, not to mention secret lovers, rivals, elder brothers who were so inconsiderate as to inherit the property when father died, and a whole host of other unwanted characters into the bargain. To put it in a nutshell, opportunity was rife for those who were disgruntled in one way or another.

The carcasses of cattle killed by tigers and panthers were systematically doctored with the result that the felines died in hundreds and have been almost wiped out in southern India. Along with them jackals, hyaenas and vultures, who shared these kills, perished in still larger numbers. There was also a sharp rise in the number of in-laws and other inconvenient people who began to succumb, suddenly, mysteriously and in increasing numbers, to violent stomachache and other alarming symptoms. Life is cheap and nobody worried unduly, while the statisticians were compensated slightly in the other graph they were maintaining with regard to the vexatious problem of 'Population Explosion and Family Planning' which happened to coincide with the advent of the poison.

To this day, unlicensed still exceed the licensed cattle by many times. The owners save that much money in license fees, the forest guards draw more than their salary now, the government loses much

more, and everyone is still happy. The only difference from the old days is that there are now no tigers, panthers, hyaenas, jackals or even vultures to join in the general rejoicing. Nearly all are dead—poisoned.

Incidentally, the villagers were not taking very kindly to the family-planning programmes. In fact, the greater number of them were distinctly annoyed about the whole thing. On the one hand, they were being urged to mechanise their farming methods and give up the old-fashioned, cattle-drawn wooden ploughs of their forefathers. At the same time, the cost of living and the prices of all commodities were rising day by day. The monsoon had a knack of not arriving when it should and of coming when it should not. Either way their crops failed. Landlords were more grasping and so were the moneylenders. The government had tried to help all it could by distributing land, oxen and ploughs free of cost to any family in order to assist farmers who preferred to stick to the old style; but money, that root of all evil, was a temptation, and the oxen and ploughs were sold or mortgaged shortly after they were distributed. The land would have followed suit as well, but that was rather too great a risk to take, being immovable property.

Finally, the price of kerosene was increasing by leaps and bounds. One could not afford to burn the midnight oil. An early dinner and early to bed became the golden rule.

In the midst of all these troubles, the poor ryot had but one consolation left to him—his cherished and beloved wife. At least she belonged to him, to do with as he wanted. What with rising costs, no kerosenre, an early dinner and early to bed, he had at least some opportunity here. She was the one solid item that was entirely his own. But at this stage along came these Family Planning people with their ridiculous advice, offering strange devices their forefathers had never heard of and begrudging the poor farmer the one and only pleasure and recreation available to him in these hard days.

So the statisticians were worried at the still steadily rising curve of population, although a trifle relieved that here and there would appear a slight kink in it, caused by the untimely demise of some in-laws and others who had succumbed to a sudden unaccountable and unbearable stomach pain that had come on immediately after dinner.

All of which brings us back to Byra the poojaree, my old friend of the jungle. Byra was very happy when he discovered that the visitor arriving at such an unearthly hour was none other than myself. He crawled out of the narrow doorway of his hut and offered the accustomed greeting of the poojarees by touching his forehead to the ground before me. Then we sat down for a chat and I told him the reason for our presence.

The jungle man was surprised and not a little concerned at the fact that we were unarmed. He thought that we were taking too great a risk, especially with elephants, and gave us the disconcerting news that there was a particularly 'bad' elephant roaming that part of the valley we had yet to negotiate. Whereas this elephant had not yet been proclaimed a 'rogue', inasmuch as it had not actually killed anybody; it was an animal that charged on sight and only the fleetness of foot and jungle-cunning of the poojarees of Kempekerai had saved them, at least so far. Byra doubted that we had that fleetness or cunning and advised us not to continue our journey that night.

'Wait for daylight,' he advised. 'At least, then you will be able to see where you are running when he chases you, although I doubt that will do you much good.'

The other reason why Byra was annoyed by the fact that we were not carrying firearms was his hope that he might have persuaded one or other of us to shoot a sambar or spotted deer for his family and himself to eat. This was Byra's only weakness, his craving for meat. Every time we met it was the same thing. He would pester me to shoot a deer or sambar, and just as steadfastly I refused. Money I was ready to give him, but I had explained a hundred times that I do not like killing deer and sambar. Although he has never succeeded in his efforts to break me down on this point, Byra never fails to try and try again. Possibly he thinks that he will wear me down eventually, and so must have our preliminary struggle every time we meet.

Eric and I decided to eat and bring out our sandwiches. Unfortunately they contained beef, an ingredient that is forbidden to nearly all south Indians, including the humblest forest folk. The cow is sacred, and to eat its flesh is outrageously and unthinkably sinful. So although we did not make the mistake of offering him any, there was a distinct look of disapproval on Byra's simple face. Eating beef was one of two things that he held against me; of the other I have just spoken. On all other matters he felt we were buddies or, to use a slang expression, 'as thick as thieves'.

Considering he had never been to school, this man, aborigine as he was, was an authority on jungle medicines obtained from flowers, fruits, leaves, roots and barks of various trees and herbs. He was the 'doctor' of the surrounding poojaree community and had been summoned in emergencies to cure all sorts of illnesses. He had a secret remedy for snakebite, and had not lost a single case, or so he said. I know for a fact he cured two cases of cholera when that dreaded epidemic spread to his community, and, as I have mentioned in one of my books, he delivered his own wife when she was having her baby.

I have witnessed this and his method was very simple. He prepared a shallow hollow in the sands of the nearest stream, and into this

hollow he put a thick layer of green leaves. In this hollow his wife lay down on her back. Next he got a torn piece of saree cloth and tied one end to the soles of her feet. This cloth was only long enough to reach to her knees. Byra gave this end to hold with both hands, and to do so the woman had to part her thighs and knees, which she raised off the ground. Byra then instructed her to pull hard upon the end, whereupon, with hardly a whisper, the baby was born and Byra welcomed it into this world by raising it by the heels and slapping it on the back. He had no scissors, so the sharp end of a stone or mussel-shell (which could be found along the banks of most steams), operating against a flat stone, served to sever the cord.

Within half an hour of the appearance of the placenta, the wife rose, suckled her infant and walked away. Byra then shovelled the sand into the hollow until it was entirely filled.

Knowing my weakness for tea Byra had already made a fire, and on this I placed my canteen filled with water from the stream. It was very muddy and the resultant brew was rather substandard. I told the poojaree of our encounter with the three tigers not far upstream, and he said that these three were the only ones in residence there at that moment. There had been another female, but she had wandered away some months earlier and had not returned. He went on to say that frequently one or other of the three tigers would attack the herds while the cattle were grazing in the forest and kill one of the cows.

The tigress had been calling quite a lot recently, he confirmed. The poojarees in the hamlet had heard her only two nights earlier. All three animals were cattle-lifters, but none of them had shown any inclination to attack the graziers, who had frequently driven them away from their kills to salvage the hides for drying and sale. He added that there was also a pair of panthers living on the other side of the stream that occasionally killed a stray cow if opportunity allowed. A month earlier, one of these panthers had pulled down a calf and was killing it when one of the tigers rushed out of the undergrowth, put the panther to flight and carried the calf away, slung across its back.

We stood up to leave, when Byra once again remonstrated about the great risk we were running with the 'bad' elephant. However, to remain in shelter at the *patti* for the rest of the night was not jungle 'ghooming', and ghooming was the purpose of the trip. We explained this to the poojaree and shouldered our loads, but not before I checked to make certain that the cobra was still safely secured.

'Very well then; I will go with you', the little man announced. 'When the sun rises I will return. Till then, I shall remain with you and offer what protection lies in my power. I don't think you realise the danger you will be in if you happen to meet the elephant in this darkness', he stressed, 'for the beast will be upon you before you know

where you are and crush you to a pulp.'

With these ominous words in our ears we left Kempekerai and headed downhill to the stream. I led, shining the torch; Byra followed me, while Eric brought up the rear. We reached and crossed the water and followed the narrow *path* before us into the labyrinths of the jungle. It was distinctly chilly and a junglecock, crowing among the bamboos, reminded us it was two in the morning. Like their cousins, the domestic roosters, wild cocks follow the same habits in the jungles that are not unduly disturbed by men or too many wild cats. They crow at two and at four in the morning, and just after the false dawn, usually before six o'clock.

We might have covered a half-mile when Byra stepped up from behind and halted me with his hand upon my arm. He reached forward to extinguish the torch. Eric half-asleep now collided with us before he realised we had stopped. I strained my ears, but heard no sound. The junglecock had passed out of hearing range.

The stars cast a sheen over the forest that was quite different from moonlight. It was a soft and ethereal light that just succeeded in making itself felt in the darkness without breaking its dominion. The forest that surrounded us was as black as a bottomless pit, the starlight being enough only to see each other and the few yards around us.

I looked at Byra inquiringly. He touched his nose with the forefinger and thumb of his left hand, at the same time swinging his right arm, from elbow downwards, to right and left before him.

The elephant! Byra could smell it! It must be very close indeed, or the poojaree would have whispered his message in my ear.

I wrinkled my nose in an effort to catch the scent. At the same time I turned my head sideways, one cheek in the direction we were moving and the other in the direction whence we had come. I fancied I could detect a peculiar odour which within a few seconds I began to associate with the presence of an elephant. These animals smell strongly when they are close. But perhaps it was a figment of my imagination.

My cheeks told me there was hardly a breeze blowing from any direction, a fact that was neither good nor bad. Had the breeze been blowing from behind us, the elephant—provided there was one ahead—would have scented us by now. Had the breeze been blowing from him to us, we might have been able, exercising the greatest caution, to creep past him undetected. As matters stood, with practically no breeze in any direction, our situation was one of stalemate. The elephant—supposing there was one ahead—had not so far detected our presence. But he was bound to do so if we moved any closer. Even if he did not scent us, he would certainly hear us in that deathly

silence.

Byra had come to the same conclusion much earlier. He raised his right palm at waist level. The signal was plain as if he had spoken: 'Wait!' Tensely we stood quite motionless.

The moments dragged by. We heard no sound. I could smell the strange odour still, but I could not associate it with an elephant. Perhaps Byra was wrong after all and there was no elephant before us.

Then the silence was broken. We heard a rustling sound, growing louder and heavier and moving along the pathway on which we were standing. Byra had been right. There was an elephant ahead, and he was moving through the undergrowth in our direction. It was only a matter of seconds before he would emerge upon the pathway.

Byra signalled to us to retreat and gave the lead by turning around and walking on tiptoe down the track along which we had just come. Eric followed, and I brought up the rear.

At that moment the breeze decided to take a hand. A gust blew strongly down the valley, passing over us and directly towards the elephant. The cat was now out of the bag!

The elephant scented us and in the next instant was crashing through the rest of the undergrowth. He came out upon the track behind me. Still retreating, all three of us turned around. We could see his colossal black bulk now, like a great big black rock astride the track. Two long streaks of white stood out against that blackness. His tusks!

A moment later and we knew, indeed, that this was the 'bad' elephant about which Byra had warned us. For no sooner did the beast set eyes upon us than he recognised us for his avowed enemies—men. He trumpeted his shriek of hate and came charging towards us, looking blacker and bigger at every instant.

To run away would be hopeless. At so short a distance no man can escape a charging elephant. Either Eric or myself, encumbered as we both were with our loads, would fall a prey to this monster. He would smash to a jelly whichever one of us he caught first. To try to dodge into the bushes either to right or left was equally hopeless because of the darkness. It looked as if only Byra would live to tell the tale.

I did the only thing possible in the circumstances. I took a very flimsy chance. I stopped, turned around. At the same time I yelled with all my might.

The bright beam fell fully upon the monster, scarcely ten feet away. In a peculiarly detached and interested fashion, I noticed that the animal had curled in his trunk, that his head was raised, showing a half-opened mouth, and that the points of his tusks were in line with his small, gleaming, wicked eyes. He lowered his head to bring those tusks into line with me and thus let the torchlight fully into his eyes.

The next instant a cloud of dust hid the ground and the elephant's legs.

I was still screaming when I realised that the brute had come to a halt. Braking suddenly, by planting his four great feet in the ground, was the cause of the dust.

I did not know it then, but seeing the peril I was in made Byra stop, turn around and come to my assistance. He was screaming too, I suddenly realised; words of ludicrous, vile abuse to the elephant, all of its kind and its ancestors. Eric had dashed past him and was still in full flight. He did not mean to desert me but had not realised that the elephant was so close as to compel me to turn around and face him.

The next few moments were electric. What was going to happen next was a matter of life or death. Would the pachyderm press his attack home, or would Byra and I succeed in turning him?

With sinking heart I remembered Byra's words of warning, uttered but a short while earlier. Once it charged, nothing would stop this elephant.

The monster shook his head from right to left and back again several times, with the purpose of avoiding the piercing beam of my torch that shone fully into his eyes. But I followed his movements with my torch, still shouting lustily.

The brute stood his ground. Then I took the last chance left. Yelling like a maniac, I stepped forward sharply, directing the beam fully into those small, wicked eyes. Then his courage broke, he turned half around so that his huge bulk, facing broadside on, straddled the narrow track.

Without speaking to each other, Byra and I knew that it was now or never. With concerted shouts, we rushed towards the monster, my torch still shining directly upon its head. The elephant was unnerved. Like all big bullies, he was accustomed to attack and see his enemies scatter like chaff before the wind. Never before had any puny creature dared to attack him.

That was exactly what was happening now. He could not get that glaring light out of his eyes and our discordant screams were unnerving him. So he lumbered up the pathway away from us, Byra and I behind him, still shouting at the top of our voices. To shake us off, he swerved sharply to the left and crashed through the undergrowth.

Byra and I came to a stop. We had accomplished his rout. Now we had to get away as quickly as possible. Turning once again we walked back the way we had come. It would not do for us to run, for that might bring the elephant back. We could find no traces of Eric!

It was but half-a-mile to the spot where we had to cross the stream to return to Kempekerai, but Eric did not know the place. Probably he

had passed it and continued along the track beyond.

Byra broke into a trot to try overtake him, while I walked rapidly on. I was not feeling so good. In fact, I was feeling awfully sick and I noticed that I was shaking as if in fever and did not seem to be able to stop. Also I was soaking wet—perspiration no doubt, although I did not remember perspiring so much. I toyed with the idea of sitting down for a few moments but the thought came to me that the black devil might change its mind and return to the attack. So I walked all the faster. Very soon I reached the ford leading to Kempekerai, and there was no sign of Eric or Byra.

I splashed through the stream and climbed the winding *path* to the hamlet. Reaching the huts I threw myself on the ground to get rid of the nausea that had not yet passed away.

It was some time before Byra arrived with Eric. The poojaree told me that my friend was a good runner. He had to follow for almost two miles before he succeeded in overtaking Eric. Eric's version was that when he glanced back, but could see neither Byra nor myself, he concluded that the elephant had got both of us. This had made him run all the faster.

Byra seemed quite unperturbed by our recent adventure. To him it was part of everyday forest existence. He suggested we brew some tea. If there was one thing Byra had a weakness for, it was tea. So have I, but for once I did not feel up to drinking any. Throwing down my haversack, I told him and Eric to help themselves. Then I lay down on the bare earth and fell asleep.

The sun was shining brightly when I awoke. Eric was sleeping soundly close by, lying neatly on his groundsheet, covered with a light blanket. Byra was coiled almost into a ball by the side of a small fire that had long gone out. His head was touching his knees.

My teeth were chattering with the cold. Lying on the ground with no covering had made matters worse. In the chill of the morning, when enthusiasm is usually at an ebb, I wondered if the risks we had taken the previous night were justified. I remembered reading in an article somewhere or the other, that it is at such a time—when one first awakens—that the influence of the subconscious mind is at its strongest, and the impressions one receives at the moment conveyed the wisest and best advice. It went on to say that, should the recipient follow this advice, he would prosper and avoid the pitfalls of living. But these few moments of good sense pass all too swiftly, the article continued, to give place to the individual's own individuality and way of thinking, and he then relapses into his own fixed ideas.

I fear this is what happened to me, for those minutes of common sense were put aside. I aroused Eric and Byra, and while the latter relit the fire to brew our tea, Eric and I went down to the stream for a

cold bath and brush-up. It is wonderful what a bath in a mountain stream will do for the cobwebs in one's brain, and for muscles that ache and eyes that are still heavy from insufficient sleep.

By the time we returned, Byra had not only boiled the water and made the tea, but had drunk more than half of it himself. He offered a ready excuse for this by saying that he felt the fever coming on, and as the *dorai* knew very well, plenty of tea is the only prescription for averting fever. I replied that the *dorai* had never known this but would bear it in mind by dishing out less of the ingredients that go to make the beverage the next time. Then Eric and I finished what was left.

A cold breakfast, followed by a smoke and some desultory chat, led Byra to ask what we intended doing next. I replied that we would sleep for most of that day and start again with nightfall to finish our journey at the point where the stream joins the Chinar river. This we expected to reach about midnight. After another short rest, we would start to return, accomplishing the trip this time by daylight. We hoped to get to Aiyur by dusk the following evening, when 'Sudden Death' ought to get us back to Bangalore in time for dinner.

The poojaree was not happy to learn our plans. He implied, by indirect comparison with a donkey which, in spite of being repeatedly beaten yet refuses to go forward, that we had failed to learn our lesson at the hands of the elephant, by wanting to pass through his domain once again after darkness. He suggested we start about two in the afternoon instead, when all pachyderms take, or should take, their siestas by standing asleep in the shelter of some thick clump of tress, so that by nightfall we should be well away from the places where *pisachee* (devil) usually hung out. Of course, if our luck was bad, he might have gone further afield, in which case we might still run into him, but at least that risk was not as great as would be the case by starting after dark. Byra also insisted upon accompanying us as far as the Chinar River and back again, saying he would not leave us till we were at least five miles on the return journey between Kempekrai and Aiyur, where we had left the car.

We discussed the matter and wiser, if less adventurous, counsel prevailed. We decided to follow Byra's plan and, as there was nothing better to do, we fell asleep. Soon after midday we ate a cold lunch, followed by more tea, and at exactly two o'clock were on our way again, retracing our steps on the narrow pathway along which we had so precipitously bolted the night before. But this time we could look about us and take all possible precautions by testing the wind and keeping a sharp lookout for signs of the elephant.

We were unlucky from the start. A strong wind was blowing from north to south, that is, down the stream from behind us and in the direction we were going. It would inform the rogue of our approach

should he be anywhere ahead.

Plainly, on the damp earth of the narrow pathway, we could see our own footmarks: the blurred impressions of Eric's rubber shoes, the larger marks made by my own alpaca-lined boots, Byra's bare footsteps, and imposed upon them all the ponderous, almost dish-sized tracks left by the elephant that had chased us the night before.

Byra was in front. Every now and then he stopped to test the wind by plucking a few blades of grass from the ground and dropping them from shoulder-height. Imperceptibly, they fell to earth at a slight angle ahead of us. The wind was still blowing from behind.

Byra stopped to listen. We halted and listened too. The forest was athrob with life. Birds twittered all round. We could hear their more distant calls from the hillsides to right and left. Cicadas and crickets of all varieties chirped in different cadences. The single, shrill resonance of the plains-cicada is here mixed with the rising and falling sonority of the hill variety, smaller in size than its cousin of lower-lying areas but capable of emitting a far louder sound. Then a myriad crickets of all sizes, ensconced beneath leaves or hidden under rotting logs of wood, joined in the general vibration of insect vociferation, filling the air with the sound of throbbing, omnipresent life.

Far ahead of us a barking-deer learned of our approach. The wind blowing down the valley told him. 'Kharr!' he cried, and again and again 'Kharr! Kharr!'

The langur monkeys, high up on both hillsides, heard him. 'Whoomp! Whoomp! Whoomp!' they shouted in sheer glee, leaping from branch to branch and rock to rock. But the little barking-deer continued his alarm-cry.

This worried the langurs. Their whoomps of joy died down. Now they were silent. I could picture the langur-watchman, seated on tree-top, peering hard into the valley below, trying to discover the nature of the danger that had alarmed the little deer. The shaggy brows in his round black face must be beetled with worry and uncertainty; his large, round, black eyes must be searching the streambed far below and such game-paths as were visible to him from that height, in an effort to see the foe. He was responsible for the safety and lives of the numerous she-monkeys and babies of the tribe gambolling in innocence around him. Should he fail in his duty, by failing to give the alarm, one of them would die. No doubt he thought that at any moment he would see the stripes of a tiger or the spotted coat of a panther slinking from bush to bush.

He saw nothing, for we were yet too far away.

Nevertheless the little deer, whose keen sense of smell had told him of something the langur could not see, announced our approach by continuing to bark and bark, 'Kharr! Kharr! Kharr!'

The langur-watchman became increasingly uneasy. What kind of foe was this, approaching but invisible?

At last he could stand the tension of uncertainty no longer. He had to warn the tribe. 'Harr! Ha!' he shouted gutturally, and again in quick succession, 'Harr! Ha! Harr! Ha!'

The alarm had its effect at once. Although we could not see or hear them, there followed a hundred thuds as langur-mothers clutched their babies to their breasts and leapt prodigious distances to safety in the loftiest tree-tops. Others scampered up rocks or ran up the hillside. A hundred black faces turned in anxiety to their watchman. What enemy had he seen? His next action would tell them.

If a tiger or panther were approaching, the watchman would, surely leap from his tree-top to another. He would stand on his two feet, with long tail erect to keep his balance, look downwards and abuse the enemy in langur-language.

The watchman did none of these things. He still had not seen us. So he continued his alarm, 'Harr! Ha!' and again 'Harr! Ha!' A sambar stag, resting on a bed of high grasses somewhere up the mountainside to our left, heard the commotion. He sprang to his feet and cried 'Dhank! Dhank! Honk!' These signals of alarm from the different denizens of the forest had not sounded in vain. They were heard by listening and understanding ears. Ponderous ears, indeed. For at that precise moment the elephant struck again.

Decades old, and wise in the ways of the jungle, he had been hearkening and hiding in motionless silence. He had heard the alarm-cry of the barking-deer, the calls of the langur-watchman and the belling of the disturbed sambar stag. Undoubtedly he had smelt us, too, for he was standing much nearer and knew that it was the hated human foe who had come again.

He made up his mind quickly. This time he was not going to fail in his purpose. His purpose was t6 destroy one of the hated, two-legged foes. He would wait in silence till we walked right up to him. Then and then only would he charge. By this means he was sure to catch one of us.

We knew nothing of his presence or what was passing in his evil mind. Despite his size, he remained hidden by a rock to our left behind which he had taken up his position. For once Byra, man of the forests as he was and versed in jungle-lore from childhood, and with unnumbered generations of jungle-ancestors before him, was deceived. Walking warily in the lead, with Eric and myself following light-footed behind, he moved forward step by step.

Byra saw the big rock to his left and halted to study it carefully. We saw it, too, and stopped to look. It was a large, high, loaf-shaped rock, almost black in colour except for two large patches of grey

lichen growing upon its surface. A fig tree clung to one side of it. We noticed that some of the roots of this tree had run over the rock. One root strayed down the side, resembling a long, thick, light-coloured snake going into the ground.

All this we saw. But we did not see the elephant hiding behind that rock, because he made neither sound nor movement.

Byra was satisfied that there was no danger and that it was safe to proceed. He walked forwards slowly. We followed.

Now we stood abreast to the rock. Now we began to pass it. The elephant knew then that in another second we would see him. He also knew that now we were so close that he must be able to catch at least one of us. He made up his mind.

An ear-splitting scream rent the silence: 'Tri-aa-aa-ank!'

Then he was upon us. He meant business this time for he did not utter another sound. From behind the rock his black form emerged. The great trunk was coiled inwards like a giant snake, behind high-thrown head and flattened ear. His mouth was half-open.

Eric, in front of me, turned and ran. So did I. Instinctively, Byra knew that if he followed he would be caught, as he would be a third man running behind two others, who would baulk him. He decided to swerve and try to escape by running downhill and across the stream which flowed parallel to the pathway we were following.

He had no chance. The elephant was upon him. It uttered a short and muffled half-scream, above which I heard Byra's shriek of despair. There was 'whoosh' followed by a thud.

The elephant then gave vent to his rage by trumpeting repeatedly: 'Tri-aaa-ank! Tri-aaa-ank! Tri-aa-ank!'

I was running as fast as my clumsy boots would let me. Eric younger in years, lighter in build, and wearing soft shoes, overtook me and disappeared ahead. I am ashamed to say that I continued to run. I know I should have stopped and gone to Byra's aid. Of small consolation was the thought that unarmed as I was, there was nothing I could do, and as the elephant was thoroughly enraged my shouts would not deter him. The night before, my torch beam in the darkness had confused him. Now he would finish me off as well.

The elephant had stopped. I could hear him screaming still. He was probably trampling poor Byra to pulp.

I reached the crossing. Eric was on the other side of the stream. A short distance higher lay Kempekerai and safety. As hurriedly as possible we recruited all the poojarees in the hamlet. Torches of wood and grasses were made. Embers to light them were carried in broken pots. Two dozen in number, we recrossed the stream, set the torches alight, and with the whole party shouting at the top of their voices, we set forth to gather what remained of my poor friend.

The elephant was silent, although we expected him to show at any moment. Would he charge our party?

I did not think so. We were two dozen strong and we were making a terrific noise.

The next moment we saw him. He was standing squarely upon the pathway. Irritably, he was shaking his head from side to side, his great trunk wagging along with the motion. His ears were flapping forwards. We could see his bloodshot little eyes staring at us. Clearly he was undecided as to whether to charge or beat a retreat.

Each member of our party excelled himself that day. Every one was shouting louder still, if that were possible. The elephant continued to hesitate. Then his nerve failed. He turned about; then he faced around again. Unexpectedly, he made off up the hill to our left. We advanced cautiously, continuing to yell.

At each moment we expected to come across the remains of the luckless Byra, squashed to a pulp. I could picture the little man before me, his grin spreading from ear to ear, and two jet-black little eyes gleaming with laughter. The vision choked me. I could join in the shouting no longer. The little man had sacrificed his life to save us. Had he escaped, the elephant would have followed and got one of us. Eric, walking beside me, looked grim, although he continued to yell with the rest.

But we could not find the remains of what had once been Byra, although we searched everywhere. Could he have escaped?

We spread out to search in an ever-widening circle, but still there was no sign. Hope began to dawn in each of us. Just then, I heard what sounded like a faint groan. A couple of the poojarees near me had heard it too. We stopped to listen, but there was no other sound.

My companions, always superstitious, began to grow afraid. Three of us had clearly heard that groan. Some spirit must have made the sound. Maybe Byra's spirit. The two who heard cast fearful glances at me. A few moments more and perhaps they would take off.

Then I clearly heard the word '*Dorai*'. It came very faintly, but there was no doubt about it. But from where? There was nothing in sight but grass and trees—and the big black rock.

The solution came in a flash. Byra was alive, and he was on top of that rock. How did he get there? Why, the elephant threw him there, of course!

I told my two companions the good news. In a trice they had clambered up the steep sides of the rock, and then we heard their joyful shouts: 'He's alive! Byra is alive!'

All of us grouped around the rock while the two men on top called out that Byra had said the elephant had thrown him up in the air. Luckily, he had fallen on top of the rock, where the beast could not

get at him again. Had he fallen back to the ground, he would certainly have been crushed.

Then came bad news: 'His leg is broken, *Dorai*. Broken at the thigh.'

Removing my clumsy boots, I managed to get up the rock aided by my two companions pulling from above and others pushing from below. I found Byra with his thigh broken, but he was still smiling!

Possibly the elephant had seized him by the leg and broken the bone when it threw him. Perhaps falling on the hard rock was the cause. However, the all-important fact was that Byra was still alive. We made a stretcher out of branches, jungle-vines and soft, green leaves. As tenderly as we could, we moved him on to this. Meanwhile I sent for ropes from Kempekerai. Fastening these to the ends of the rough stretcher, we lowered him off the rock as gently as possible. Then we carried him back to the hamlet.

I had a difficult task to persuade Byra to let me take him to a hospital in Bangalore. He wanted to remain at Kempekerai until the ends of his broken thighbone joined.

Many jungle medicines and leaves possess marvellous healing properties. No doubt the end of the broken bone would unite. But would they join straight? Would Byra be able to walk normally again? I stressed these things and urged him to let me take him to hospital, but it was nightfall before I got his consent. The people of the forest are very afraid of our hospitals.

We set forth for Aiyur at break of day, willing hands bearing the stretcher, but it was very difficult to fasten the stretcher across the open box-*machan* that formed the body of 'Sudden Death,' my Model T Ford. At last it was done and by slow driving, avoiding the many potholes, it still took us a long time to reach the hospital at Bangalore.

There we created a sensation. Every doctor, nurse and ward-boy present, and every patient who could hobble and was not at death's door turned out to see the strange sight. It is not often that one comes across a car without a body, with no mudguards or driving seat, but with only an open box tied to it behind, and balancing precariously upon that open box a fragile stretcher of jungle wood, vines and leaves holding a small man, practically naked, with a broken thigh.

In four months Byra could walk as well as ever. The broken thighbone joined perfectly. The doctor said he had been a good patient. I know that the only thoughts that had sustained him throughout this period of pain and adversity were visions of his beloved jungles, and their mountains and streams.

It was a glad day when I took him back by car to Aiyur and walked with him to Kempekerai. We had to do it in slow stages. This time you may be sure I did not take Eric. For one I did not want to tempt the

jinx that seemed to accompany this friend of my schooldays.

I almost forgot to relate that I was compelled to release the cobra I had caught two nights earlier when we were carrying Byra to the car. It would have been an added burden and a nuisance on the journey.

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* See: *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue*.
* See: *The Tiger Roars*.
** See: *Man-Eaters and Jungle Killers*.

Two

The Medical Lore of India

THE POORER PEOPLE OF SOUTHERN INDIA CANNOT AFFORD TO GO TO a doctor to find cures for their ailments, for the very good reason that a single visit would take a large bite out of a week's earnings.

To give you an example: suppose a man has a sore or is suffering from a recent injury to a finger or leg, what would be the doctor's charges? Well, an injection of some sort would be indicated, probably antitetanus or penicillin in some form. Then there might be a dressing to be applied, together with tablets of some sulpha drug. The injection would cost at least, 1.50 rupees. The dressing and tablets another rupee. The doctor's professional fees would be around 3.50 rupees, so that the bill would be in the region of six rupees, a figure that represents three day's earnings at two rupees a day, if the patient is an unskilled labourer or a farmhand, and a full day's earning if he happens to be 'skilled'. So the ordinary man will think many times before going to a doctor.

So what does he do? He simply walks out on to the roadside where, within a few yards and in a minute or two he will undoubtedly come across a nice, warm flat mass of dung recently deposited by one of the many cattle that wander at will all over the streets and countryside. Our patient dips one or two of his fingers into the mess and comes up with a wet, sticky lump of dung which he applies to wound, tapping the same in smartly till it covers the whole surface of the injury in the shape of a small saucer.

That is all there is to it. Does it work? Incredibly it does in the great majority of cases. If, perchance, the treatment should fail and the wound not get better, or even gets worse, the reason (to the patient) is as plain as the nose on his face, and simple too. There was something wrong with the cow that passed the dung, and so sets out to repeat the treatment with another sample of excreta.

'But tetanus germs live in a cow dung' you exclaim. 'The medical books say so.' Undoubtedly they do, but you would have a real hard time getting that idea across to the patient. He would not believe a word of what you said, for one thing. For another, he would not believe there were such things as germs. When you tell him they are so small that he cannot see them with his eyes, he concludes the tale is a figment of your imagination or ignorance, deliberately told in order to frighten him into seeing a doctor. Very likely you are a doctor yourself.

Cobwebs of the species of spider that lives in holes in the ground, and those of the variety that spins its webs between the branches of small bushes, where they scintillate with multicoloured light-like clusters of jewels when the rising sun falls upon the dew that has gathered upon them, are sterling remedies when gathered freshly and plugged into freely bleeding wounds.

Juice from freshly broken pods of garlic is said to allay the irritation caused by mosquito bites, while for any form of eye trouble, the patient should stand facing the rising sun and squeeze orange-peel into his eyes. Equal quantities by weight of finely powdered indigo seeds and finely powdered tobacco leaf, put into the eyes at night, is reputed to cure cataract, although the patient is cautioned to expect some sensation of burning.

The bottle-bird or Indian tree sparrow performs a wonderful feat of architecture and tailoring when she builds her long, bottle-like nest of closely woven fibres and suspends it by a single strand from a tall date palm. After laying her eggs, the mother bottle-bird searches the landscape later in the evening, at an hour when she would otherwise be safely in her nest, for an early firefly or more than one firefly if she is lucky. Injuring the firefly sufficiently to prevent it from escaping but not seriously enough to kill outright, the wise little bird now introduces the insect into the nest through the cleverly constructed entrance that, strangely enough, is at its lower end.

What does our villager do when hurrying home unduly late of an evening and happens to notice the glow of the firefly through the interstices of a nest? He does not stop and climb the tree right away to break down the nest and procure the elfin within. That would take too long. He is already late and soon it will be quite dark. Moreover, he is alone. This is the hour when devils begin to emerge from their lairs

beneath tombstones, from the trunks of *neem* and banyan trees, and from holes in the ground. In fact, the variety known as *minnispurams* are known to live in tall trees. Or, if he is near a jungle, there is the possibility of encountering a wild beast. So he makes note of the position of the tree in which the nest swings with its tiny lantern inside, and he hastens on his way.

The following morning he is back. Date palms are notoriously difficult to climb because of their thorny trunks and spiked leaf-tips. Our yokel therefore brings with him from the village a long bamboo pole, or if any grow nearby he proceeds to lop one of suitable length.

With this he brings down the nest by beating the single strand that secures it to a frond, and then he loses no time in extracting the firefly. That tiny glimmer is invisible now in the dazzling sunshine, but the villager knows it will shine again once the sun goes down and darkness covers the land.

He may keep it for good luck! Or he may eat it, for he reasons that the light will shine inside him, just as it shone in the nest, and will illuminate all the nooks and corners of his intestines so that the good spirit that looks after his welfare may be able to see and cure anything that is not quite right.

If young birds or eggs happen to be in the nest, he will throw them away with the rest of the nest, or if he is of a lower caste he might even eat the fledgelings.

Some of the wild creatures of this land are in great demand as medicine and are killed as soon as they are seen, if they are not lucky enough to get away. The black-faced grey langur monkey perhaps heads this list. Once common throughout the country, in southern India he has been slain mercilessly till the few of his kind that remain have moved into the innermost recesses of the forest. Even there they are shot by marauding bands of poachers, although their slaying is prohibited by the government. All this is being done in the belief that the flesh of a langur monkey is one of the most effective aphrodisiacs any failing male can hope to find.

Another unfortunate creature that is sacrificed to make medicine for the same purpose is the elegant Indian slender lorris, mistakenly called a 'sloth'. It is a pretty little monkey, delicately made, with no tail and two large, limpid brown eyes that reflect the rays of a torch as if they were made of pools of crimson fire. As it moves rather slowly, this poor creature is easily captured. Then its two eyes are torn out of their sockets while it is still alive to make a marvellous aphrodisiac for some man who has spent a lifetime in womanising and has reached a stage when he can womanise no more. The lorris, still alive but bereft of its two eyes and totally blind, is thrown aside to fend for itself. Unhappily, these little beasts possess a good deal of vitality and linger

for days, till they eventually die of starvation.

Once I happened to find one in this state. I took it home, attended to its torn eye-sockets as best as I could, and fed it with milk. Despite its ghastly wounds the little monkey recovered.

For a long time it would not trust me, nor allow me to touch it, and bit viciously. But could anybody blame the tiny creature for being distrustful of human beings after the terrible ordeal it had suffered at their hands? Eventually, however, this little animal understood that I meant it no harm and was trying to befriend it. From that moment it changed its attitude towards me. No more affectionate and gentle little creature have I kept as a pet at any time.

A third mammal that suffers greatly in southern India because of a belief that may or may not have any foundation is the large Indian fruit bat commonly referred to as the 'flying fox'. The flesh of this mammal is reputed to be a very effective remedy for asthma, and as this complaint is widespread in the land despite its tropical climate, the flying fox is diligently shot, or netted, whenever the opportunity offers. However, in this instance the mammal is killed outright and the flesh cooked, as in the case of the langur monkey, and so it escapes the awful fate that befalls the slender lorris.

Snakes that are nonpoisonous also suffer a hard fate. The poisonous ones are killed and then burned (to prevent them from coming back to life), but the large and harmless snakes, as the *dhaman* or 'rat-snake' are skinned alive and then thrown aside. It is terrible to see the poor reptile, white without its outer skin, writhing and twisting in its agony. The outer skin is roughly cured with salt and copper sulphate and then sold for a couple of rupees to make a belt or purse, being unsuitable for making shoes unless it is fully tanned.

Doctors of another school speacialise in what they proudly call 'gem therapy'. This is the art of curing sicknesses by the use of semiprecious stones. It is performed in three ways:

1. Certain stones are burned to ashes and these ashes taken on the tongue or in water. The Ayurvedic System employs this method, but it is a practice of only the very rich.
2. A single stone—or perhaps a number of them—is soaked in water for a week, and this water is distributed, in half-ounce doses, as the medicine. Eleven jewels in particular are employed, namely the diamond, ruby, emerald, sapphire (both blue and white), moonstone, coral, cat's-eyes, gomed, pearl, amethyst and topaz. A twelfth, the opal, is made use of only in the case of eye ailments. A combination consisting of a number of these gems is allowed to 'cook' in water for a week. This water is then administered in small doses in cases of a more obstinate nature.

3. What is considered the highest form of gem treatment employs the principle of radiation and vibration. When a complaint is diagnosed and the gems that form the remedy are decided upon, the patient is seated directly in front of an electric fan, to the blades of which the required gem, or number of gems in little bags of netting are attached. The current is then switched on and the blades made to rotate at high speed for fifteen or twenty minutes. The idea is that radiations of cosmic colour-force are thrown off from the gem or gems attached to the fan-blades directly upon the patient. This form of therapy is claimed to cure a sufferer from most long-standing complaints within a few weeks.

This therapy can also be used upon a patient residing miles away or in another country, even at the opposite end of the world. In such a case an object, intimate with person, is employed, it may be a photograph, a smear of blood upon blotting paper, a lock of hair, a fingernail or even handkerchief. This object, called 'the sample', is attached to a wooden frame which in turn is positioned six inches in front of the electric fan, to the blades of which the gems have been previously attached in small bags of netting. The current is switched on and the blades allowed to rotate at high speed for several hours, instead of just fifteen to twenty minutes, as when the patient is present in person. Astonishing cures have been reported.

But we have all heard of the Tibetan prayer-wheel which is used to rotate continuously with a prayer or a wish that has been enclosed within, while the petitioner concentrates upon it. He believes his wish will thus be granted, and very often it comes to pass. There could be connection between the crude revolving prayer-wheel and the revolving blades of the electric fan, of course, and the gems in their net-bags might simply be factors to aid the concentration of thought.

While the blades of the electric fan employ the principle of radiation, 'vibration' is used in employing an electric 'vibrator' or even a radio loudspeaker. The patient is seated directly in front of such a vibrator, upon which the selected gem or gems are placed and the current switched on, when the cosmic rays are said to be vibrated from the gems to the patient. Distant treatments are also undertaken in the same manner as with the electric fan. The patient's 'sample' is attached to a frame placed six inches in front of the vibrator. In some cases a variation is achieved by vibrating the 'sample' along with the gems in their net-bags, placing them all together upon the vibrator or at the centre of the loudspeaker's cones and switching on the current. For distant treatments, as in the case of the electric fan, the vibrator is made to work for some hours. The trembling vibration is said to impart the cosmic colour-force of the gems from the vibrator to the

patient or his 'sample'.

These 'samples' as are said to represent the patient and to identify with him in all respects, no matter how far away he may be, and the radiations or vibrations falling upon them amount to those radiations or vibrations falling upon the patient directly.

Sometimes prayers or urgent wishes are written down upon a piece of paper and made to rotate on the blades of a fast-working fan for some hours or are placed upon a vibrator. Invariably these prayers or wishes become reality. In all instances the 'sample' or the piece of paper with the prayer or wish written upon it, absorb the cosmic rays thrown upon it or vibrated to it, and as these articles represent the actual person or the actual wish, patient gets cured even if he lives at the far end of the world, or the prayer becomes as actuality and is granted.

Space does not permit me to go into details, but I would like to give you a very brief résumé of this system:

Diamond. For energy. Prescribed in case of sterility, venereal disease, leucorrhoea, drunkenness, old age and all rundown conditions.

Ruby. Prescribed for cases of heart disease, headache, indigestion, sprue, eye diseases, loss of appetite and mental troubles.

Emerald. Prescribed in case of stammering, childishness, stomach disorders, the habit of telling lies, want of intelligence, mania, thieving, dumbness and deafness.

Pearl. Prescribed in cases of diabetes, tuberculosis, dropsy, diarrhoea, bladder diseases, jaundice, restlessness, vices of all sorts and a weak mind.

Coral. Prescribed for liver and blood diseases, measles, high blood pressure, piles, toothache, orchitis, diseases of the joints and urine troubles.

Topaz. Prescribed mainly for mental and personal lapses such as spendthriftness, hypocrisy, talkativeness, fondness for law suits, insanity, paralysis, rheumatism, diseases of the throat or palate and liver, obesity and tumours.

Sapphire. For cases of neuralgia, deformity, enlarged spleen, dropsy, hysteria, epilepsy and all forms of nervousness.

Gomed. For mental fears, suicidal tendencies, uterine troubles, constipation, diseases of the brain and glands, tumours and liver abcess.

Cat's-Eye. For boils, skin diseases, cancer fissure, itching, smallpox.

Opal. Mainly for all troubles involving the eyes.

The reader will undoubtedly be amused by the idea that gems might be able to effect any cure whatever, especially by the theory that 'radiation' or 'vibration' could be used on behalf of any patient

thousands of miles away. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and there appears to be some justification.

From the beginning the government of India has not imposed a ban upon any of the many systems of medicine practised in this country, nor has any preference been shown officially for any particular practice. This policy was followed because of the numerous castes and creeds, some of whom have a marked liking for a particular system. The western systems are allopathy and homeopathy, from which we have the offshoots of elctro-homeopathy and Dr Schusscler's biochemical system of the 'twelve tissue remedies'.

The standard Hindu system is Ayurveda, in which the medicines are prepared from the leaves, bark, roots, seeds or flowers of herbs, plants and trees, with its sister system of Siddha, which is practically identical but practised chiefly in southern India. I can vouch for the efficacy of both these systems, which have claimed numerous successes where all other systems have failed.

Unani medicine is preferred by the Muslim community and depends for its ingredients not only upon plants, but upon minerals and precious stones as well. Chromopathy is followed by many, particularly in Hyderabad state (now Andhra Pradesh). A simple system, it employs the main colour of red, dark blue, sky blue, green, yellow and their intermediary blendings, to effect its cures. These colours are used in two ways. Glass bottles of different colours are filled to three-quarters of their capacity with plain water and allowed to 'cook' in brilliant sunlight for two days. An ounce of this water forms each dose of medicine. Along with this internal dose, the affected part of the human anatomy is exposed to coloured sunlight for twenty to thirty minutes at a time, the rays of the sun being allowed to shine upon the part through a sheet of glass of the required colour.

It is difficult nowadays to procure glass bottle, and even sheets or fragments of glass of the required colours or of their blends, so this snag is generally surmounted by purchasing transparent material like cellophane of the different hues, such as employed for making decorations. This coloured paper is wrapped once, twice or thrice around a white glass bottle, according to the depth of colour required. Blends of colours are obtained by wrapping paper of first one colour and then another around the bottle; for example red paper, and then blue, to make purple. In place of coloured glass sheets, paper of the required hue is placed directly over the affected part, which is then exposed to strong sunlight.

You will probably think that chromopathy is a lot of nonsense, but I can assure you it is not.

We have all heard of diabetic carbuncles and of how difficult they

are to cure, invariably requiring to be lanced. But let the sun shine on your carbuncle through blue glass or paper for thirty minutes twice a day, and at the same time drink four ounces of 'blue' water (water exposed to sunlight in a blue glass bottle or a bottle wrapped in transparent blue paper). Exposure to the sun must be done at noon and 3 p.m. when the days are at their hottest.

If you are anaemic, procure three large white glass bottles, wrap bright red, transparent cellophane twice around each, and tie the paper in position with red thread. Fill each bottle to three-fourths capacity with pure water and place the bottle in brilliant sunshine for two days. Mark the letters A, B and C on the corks of the respective bottles.

On the third day, finish the contents of bottle A in four or five doses. Refill the bottle immediately and place it back in the sunlight next day, while you drink the contents of the second bottle, marked B. Refill that and finish the third bottle, marked C, on the third day, refill it and put it back in the sun. On the fourth day, use the first bottle, marked A, once again, and so on. Your anaemia will begin to disappear in a week to ten days and the cost of treatment will have been the price of three sheets of transparent material.

To cure a wart or group of warts, procure a magnifying glass, wrap transparent yellow cellophane around it, and allow the sunlight to pass through the glass upon the wart, focussing the same to a point insufficiently concentrated to burn the skin. Expose the part from ten to fifteen minutes twice daily and the wart will shrivel up.

What is known as the 'urine system' is practised largely in the state of Gujarat. The basis of treatment is that the patient is kept on a low diet, amounting almost to complete fasting in some cases, and is given only his own urine to drink. No water, milk or other liquid is permitted. The system is prescribed for all complaints and is highly recommended in certain cases where allopathy and other methods have failed. Mr. Morarji Desai, a former Indian statesman, is a strong advocate of this system.

The 'de Chane system', originating in Hyderabad, is the skilful combination, by a very clever doctor, of the maxims of allopathy, homeopathy and Ayurveda. It has some astounding cure to its credit.

Diagnosis of complaints by the use of electro- or permanent magnets and a pendulum, or by plain intuition, is widely practised. Samples from the distant patient in the form of a bloodstain, a strand of hair, a silver or fingernail, a photograph or a bit of personal clothing act as substitute for the patient in his absence, and the operator not only correctly diagnoses the complaint from these substitutes without setting eyes upon the patient, but also indicates, according to whichever system of medicine the patient himself may

prefer.

Healing by Yogic exercises, *pranic* breathing, relaxation and meditation are prevalent, while we have our quota of magnetic healers employing passes and the laying on of hands, or using autosuggestion and the direct spoken command to the genes and bodycells of the patient.

I have witnessed a practitioner of the last-mentioned system in action when treating a patient with severe dysentery. Laying one hand upon the patient's abdomen and the other on the small of his back, this practitioner almost shouted at the cells of the recalcitrant bowels to do their work properly, while at the same time addressing the genes in a cajoling, persuasive manner, telling them to instruct the wayward cells to do their duties properly. The dysentery stopped within twenty-four hours.

The reciting of mantrams, the performance of magical rites, the taking of oaths to give money or other gifts to some saint when a cure has been effected, are all forms of autosuggestion that amount to self-hypnotism, a very important, and efficacious branch of the science of hypnotism, which again is a method of contact with the subconscious mind. The subconscious mind is the real centre of each one of us. It can accomplish any reasonable wish.

Black art is employed in India mostly for destructive ends but is also occasionally used for healing. It has always proved effective upon those who believe in it.

Cases of 'miracle' healing, under which heading I include religious healing, are often heard of, and the four great Indian religions—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism—claim successes in about equal numbers.

In giving this brief review of the general system of healing in use in India I have by no means covered all. Others remain that claim many cures. For instance we have the humble village soothsayer who corresponds to the medicine man of an African hamlet. This individual is the confidant of everyone, from headman and *patel* to the lowest *mochee* or cobbler, 'sweeper' and scavenger. He is called upon to heal any one of them when they are sick, to cure their cattle when bitten by snakes or rabid dogs, or their poultry when they get the Ranikhet disease. He foretells periods of drought and when the monsoon rains will break, and even when floods are likely. He gives advice when crops fail. He helps in arranging marriages, settling disputes and quarrels over land, locates runaway wives and settles domestic problems. This nosey parker knows the business of everyone in the village. To what can we ascribe his general success? Are there hidden sciences and arts in which he is really a master? Or is he just exceptionally astute, a skilled psychologist, mind and character

reader, a hypnotist to a degree and a smooth talker to a much greater degree? Or is he simply one who has a great deal of common sense and knows how to use it? But every villager will acclaim him his 'guru' (teacher).

Are there such things as 'secret potions' that can bestow good health, freedom from general sickness, perhaps from particular complaints? May be something that can bestow long life? Most people today will find this hard to believe, and about 'long life' I am not prepared to argue, having my own ideas on the subject. But I can tell you this much, and the information is culled from very ancient documents. There are three herbs that grow in India, and one in China, that are said to do just this. What's more, I have all three Indian varieties growing in my garden, while the Chinese plant, or rather an extract made from it, is available in Calcutta. But I can tell you for certain that there are herbs that keep away sickness, sustain the human heart, lower (or raise) the blood pressure, ensure against arterioscelerosis, cure asthma, diabetes, leprosy, leucoderma, rheumatism and many other complaints, and protect you totally against colds and 'flu.

I have a circular tin box filled with small blue glass bottles. Each contains one of these 'secret' herbs in powder form: I take a pinch from each of these bottles early in the morning and last thing at night and as far as possible carry this tin box with me wherever I go. People who have caught me in the act of swallowing these 'medicines' have been astounded at the number of them. And they have scoffed, but I am not perturbed. Touch wood (or my tin box), I just cannot catch a cold. The 'flu' lays out all the members of my household except myself at least twice each year. They get fever and various aches and pains, particularly when they are caught in the monsoon rains. I get soaked, too, and like it. I am sixty-three years old (1972) and can still walk a score of miles a day, especially in the jungle with the animals around me, and be fit for a few more.

For all of which, including the tin box and its contents, I thank God.

Three

Occult Lore and Other Matters

MATTERS OCCULT AND PERTAINING TO THE UNSEEN ARE TAKEN AS much for granted by the folk of southern India as are any of the material objects that they can see. Illness of any kind, a calamity, material losses or a spot of ill luck, whether of great consequence or small, are all ascribed to one of two causes. The first is the 'bad time' of the day (*rahukalam* as it is called), or maybe the 'bad time' of the recipient himself; the second is the deliberate machination of some evilly disposed enemy employing a black magician to cast a spell. In these circumstances, black magicians, spell removers (and those who cast spells), soothsayers and fortune-tellers of all descriptions are in great demand, and there never seems to be enough to go around.

In the larger towns, of an evening you will find these people seated cheek by jowl in long lines on the pavements. All kinds of fortune-tellers. Some employ a parrot or a lovebird which upon command from the owner, picks out certain playing cards from a pack or simply cards with fortunes inscribed in close lettering upon them.

Then there are fortune-tellers who ply their trade by consulting the cards directly or by throwing dice. The brotherhood of palmists is strongly represented. A few specialists tell fortunes by reading in the sand, or by charcoal marks on the pavement, or by studying the shadow thrown by the client at midday. Whatever their methods, none of them appear to want for clients, and as the fees range from one rupee to three for a consultation, the soothsayers seem to earn a

very lucrative living.

It would be futile if you were to try to dissuade any of these clients from wasting their money. They would consider you a fool or an ignoramus. The Indian mind inclines strongly to the disposition of Fate, and the parrot or the lovebird, the playing cards, shadows and the rest are all agents that can be made to foretell one's future when handled by a skilled guru.

Most illnesses are ascribed to demon visitation, and for every patient who consults a qualified doctor, there is at least another—probably many more—who seek out 'medicine-man'. I have been a direct witness to many of these cases and the *modus operandi* is almost always the same. I will quote the case of young Niklas (Nicholas actually, but nobody appeared to be able to pronounce that word properly).

He was perhaps nineteen years old, rather short, very black with a handsome cheerful face, long wavy black hair and two rows of perfect teeth that showed prominently when he grinned, which was quite often. A pleasant, hard-working lad, he was popular with everybody up to the day his father was killed suddenly.

'Titch', the father, was what is known in India as a 'lineman'. He was employed by the Electricity Department, and his duty was to be on hand at certain hours to answer emergency calls regarding electrical installations that went out of order suddenly. It was Titch's job to answer such calls and set the trouble right.

A call came through rather later one Thursday night, and Titch responded. Unfortunately, that Thursday happened to be the first of the month and Titch had drawn his salary earlier in the day. More unfortunately, Titch had been drinking. Not too much, but a little more than he should have, for Titch always celebrated payday with four or five shots of *arrack*. It did not cost much—about a shilling for two drams.

There had been a strong wind-storm about an hour earlier and the branch of a tree had fallen across the overhead cables, causing a short-circuit and some damage. It was pitch dark when Titch climbed the pole, and the miserably dim ray from the two-cell torch with its almost exhausted batteries supplied by the Department hardly showed up the tangled wires. Just then it began to rain heavily and a sudden gust of wind set free the tangled wires from where they had been hanging, while the rainwater aided conduction. One wire fell across Titch's neck and the other almost missed his bare feet. Almost—but not quite! Seven thousand volts of electricity flashed through his body and Titch fell from the pole, bringing the wires with him. He was a ghastly sight two hours later after the storm had abated and they picked him up. The wire across his neck had burned its way into his

flesh and he was a very dead man.

This event upset Niklas, but not nearly as much as his mother's conduct within the same month. She went to live with a neighbour, a young bachelor, for a week, and then the neighbour brazenly moved into the house that had belonged to Niklas's father, Titch, to live openly with the widow, Anthonyamma. All this shocked young Niklas, who spoke to his mother about it at the first opportunity. Was this how she respected the name and memory of her late husband, his father? Anthonyamma complained to her paramour, who threw Niklas out of the house that should have by rights been his and threatened to kill him should he dare to return.

Poor Niklas ran to his uncle, Arokiaswamy, for shelter, and the very next night had his encounter with a person who could have been none other than the Devil himself; or so the neighbours said. When I asked him about it, Niklas assured me he saw and spoke to this person as clearly as he was seeing and speaking to me at that moment.

There being no latrine in his home, Niklas had gone behind the nearest bush, as was the custom with all the members of the family, both male and female, in answer to the calls of nature. This had been at about nine o'clock at night, when it was quite dark. Ordinarily he would have been asleep by this time, but that night, for some reason, he did not feel sleepy. Niklas said he had been particularly careful, as it had rained an hour earlier and everyone knew that cobras came out of their holes in the ground to hunt for frogs after the rain.

He was down on his haunches when a tall man, dressed entirely in white, appeared before him. The man called him by name and bade him follow. Despite the position he was in at that moment, young Niklas had been impelled to obey and had followed behind the white figure, which maintained a distance of a dozen paces ahead despite Niklas' attempt to catch up. Another thing he had noticed was that the figure appeared to grow taller and taller but not to touch the ground.

They reached the great banyan tree that was growing half-a-furlong away, the figure in white still leading, before it finally halted. This enabled Niklas to catch up at last. He was not clear what happened next. At one moment the figure appeared to rise up vertically into the hanging roots of the old banyan. Then he could see it no longer. What he did recollect was a tremendous slap across the back of his neck, after which he remembered no more.

When Niklas failed to return, his cousin brought the fact to the notice of her mother and his uncle. Thinking nothing unusual, they had paid no attention till some time had passed. Then all three set out to look for the missing boy. The white shirt and pants Niklas had been wearing were what caught his aunt's eye, and they found him lying under the old banyan tree and carried him home. That tree was

hundreds of years old and reputed to be haunted; therefore they reasoned that the lad's condition was clearly the outcome of some evil spiritual agency or agencies.

From that time on Niklas suffered from mysterious fits, at least once each day, and sometimes as many as three or four. These fits were not epileptic, as Niklas was never unconscious in their throes. In fact he spoke clearly, but in a language nobody could comprehend, though it appeared to concern his mother and her lover. He seemed, moreover, to be in towering rage during these attacks, for his eyes flashed and his teeth gnashed. He would become so violent that the combined efforts of all three persons in the household quite failed to control him. At times he would strike them or try to bite. At other times he would roll upon the ground, froth at the mouth and rave at everyone around him. Each attack lasted from ten to fifteen minutes. Then Niklas would return to normal slowly. It took about half-an-hour before he regained his composure. In a few days these attacks increased in intensity, becoming more frequent and of longer duration, while Niklas grew more and more violent.

It was quite late one night when my servants announced that he had just been summoned to come to Niklas, who had become unusually violent. The lad was some very distant relative of his, but in India nearly everybody is a relative, even if the relationship be removed seventy times seven. Besides, nobody ever misses the opportunity to delve into somebody else's affairs, particularly when such a good excuse as being a relative offers itself.

'Master would like to come?' invited my retainer. Tonight Debbil Man come all the way from city Market to drive away this *Pey* (evil-spirit). My mother's sisters' husband's brother's daughter's son pay him fifty rupees to drive debbil out of poor Niklas, who is son by second marriage to eldest brother of father-in-law of my cousin-brother, and therefore a close relative of mine.'

My senses reeled at the prospect of attempting to unravel Niklas' real relationship to my servant, but I supposed it could be done if sufficient tenacity was applied to the problem. But I am always interested in the occult and here was a chance of witnessing something special. Not that I thought this to be a genuine case of spirit obsession. There could be many other explanations, all of them mundane in character. Niklas could be putting on an act. I knew he hated his mother's new boyfriend. Perhaps he was afraid of this man when he had lived under the same roof with him. He might influence his mother to poison the man, or he might poison the man himself or poison the uncle who had befriended him. As likely as not, this was just a case of hysteria. Yet there might be something more to it.

'I'll come along,' I announced and soon we were both standing at

the door of the tiny house occupied by Arokiaswamy, the uncle, and his family.

The place thronged with people and reeked with tobacco-smoke from numerous *beedies* (small native cigarettes wrapped in the leaves of the peepul-tree). Men and women were seated in a tight circle around Niklas, gaping to see what was going to happen next. Just then the boy appeared to be completely in his senses. He saw me enter the room, called a respectful greeting and invited me to come and sit next to him. With difficulty I climbed on the ground beside Niklas, opening the conversation by inquiring how he was.

Niklas answered that he was quite all right. Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the 'Devil Man' who was to exorcise the evil spirit.

He was a tall, cadaverous, very black individual, with unusually large eyes set in sunken sockets and great mop of black hair that surrounded his head like a woolly cap. He was dressed in a flowing black robe that reached to the ground. From looking at Niklas, his eyes fell upon me and he halted in his tracks. There was hostility in his looks and in the words that fell from his lips.

'What does the *Dorai* want here?' he asked arrogantly. 'If he is a preacher and wishes to pray, let him do so. If he is a doctor and has brought medicine, let him give it. I shall go.' With these words he turned back to the door, when many voices were raised to dissuade him from departing.

I got to my feet and called out: 'Let the driver-away-of-evil-spirits do his work in peace. I came but to see the lad, and having seen I shall return.'

The black magician (for such he was and as such I shall allude to him in the rest of this story) appeared mollified: 'Let the *Dorai* remain and watch me drive out the spirit, if he so wishes. I know all white men are consumed with curiosity regarding such things. Only he must not interrupt me by word or deed.'

'I shall not,' I promised, and sat down in my former place by the side of Niklas.

The black magician advanced, seated himself directly before Niklas and summoned his uncle Arokiaswamy, a lanky middle-aged individual, to bring the black cock and the bottle of *arrack* that had already been procured for the ceremony.

When the liquor and the trussed fowl were handed to him, the magician drew a dirty-looking pocketknife from the recesses of his clothing, unfolded the blade and began to saw the throat of the unfortunate bird with its blunt edge. The cock began to flap its wings but the magician continued till he had completely severed the head from the body. The thick red blood that gushed from the stump

contrasted strongly with the cock's black feathers. The magician allowed a small quantity of this blood to run into a diminutive aluminium drinking mug, while the rest of it dripped on to the dry earthern floor of the hut and was absorbed.

From his pocket he brought out some dry resinous powder wrapped in paper and allowed it to spill on to the floor. The magician borrowed a match from me and set fire to the powder after several attempts. It burned with a greenish flame. Then he picked up the aluminium mug and held it over this flame for a few seconds while he closed his eyes and started muttering incantations in a singsong voice. I noticed that the green flame burnt itself out pretty soon but the magician continued with his mantras.

At last he finished, opened his eyes and, lifting the mug, ordered Niklas to drink. The lad appeared to be in some kind of a trance. His eyes were open but turned upwards, so that I could see the whites. His lower jaw was slack and partly open, and he was rocking himself backwards and forwards to the rhythm of the magician's droning voice. He stretched out his hand obediently and the magician placed that mug in his grasp, closing the boy's fingers firmly around the vessel so that he would not drop it.

Once again he commanded 'drink', and at one gulp Niklas swallowed the hot red blood.

The magician now seized the boys's right wrist in his left hand, and left wrist in his right hand, and raising his voice, commenced shouting the vilest obscenities at the evil spirit said to be within the lad, calling it strings of unmentionably bad names and commanding it to be gone forthwith.

Niklas started to twist and to turn and then to struggle violently with the man who was holding him down, but the magician clung to his wrists and shouted further abuse upon the demon within, commanding it to come forth at once.

Niklas became more violent; then he started to scream aloud. But his shouts were coherent: 'Go away from here. Why do you torment us? We have no place to live and you are ordering us out of the only shelter we have been able to find for so long.'

The words almost turned into a plea. The magician released Niklas' wrists to enable himself to fill the aluminium mug to the brim with raw liquor from the bottle, and tossed the contents down his own throat. He quickly repeated this action, then laid the mug down, grasped the boy's wrists once more and recommenced ordering the demon to leave Niklas.

The lad started to struggle violently, so much so that the magician was compelled to call upon some members of the assembly to help. While this was being done, he did not lose the opportunity to fortify

himself still further with yet more *arrack*. Things came to a head a moment later when Niklas gave vent to a piercing screech, jumped to his feet in spite of the many pairs of hands that were holding him, and then fell to the ground as if poleaxed. He kicked spasmodically a few times, stretched his body tautly while grinding his teeth (which sound we all could hear), then threw his arms above his head and ceased to move.

A low wail came from the audience. Clearly most of them thought the boy was dead, but as I watched his chest I could detect rise and fall of his breathing.

The magician was now pointing dramatically to the corner of the room where the light from an oil-lamp hanging from a nail on the wall could barely reach. 'Do you see them?' he quavered. 'Not one spirit, but two. A man and a woman.'

Everyone looked in the direction he was pointing. Of course, nothing could be seen, but the people seated nearest to that corner scrambled hastily to their feet and backed away.

Sensing he was master of the situation, the magician then started to engage in a garbled argument with the spirits that only he could see and hear.

'No, you shall not come back,' he yelled. 'No, not even if you pay me a thousand rupees. These are poor folk. The miserable advance they have paid me for my services is but a pittance. I know they will pay me much more before I leave, so I won't take any part of the one thousand rupees you are offering me.'

'Stand aside,' he ordered. 'Stand away from the doorway. The two spirits are leaving now. Can't you see them? A man and a woman; both completely naked. The woman is very beautiful. She is bedecked with jewels. She has a very pretty face and a lovely figure, but she is evil—very, very evil. For the woman is a devil, you must know.'

'Stand aside,' he continued while the crowd, and particularly the menfolk, began to gape in the hope of a glimpse of this lovely, naked girl. 'Stand, I say. For if she gets within reach of you she may change her mind about leaving and enter into you instead, then you will know all about it.'

There was a general stampede to the opposite side of the room, which being filled with people already, caused considerable pushing and shoving. At that moment my eye JUNGLES LONG AGO caught the magician's. I could swear there was a twinkle of laughter in his. He seemed to be saying to me: 'If people want to be fooled so easily, let me fool them. Don't spoil things.' So I remained a silent spectator.

'Ah, now they are leaving' went on the magician. Then, after a moment, They have left. Now nobody should go outside for at least half an hour to allow the spirits to get clear away.' As a result, I was

obliged to remain another thirty minutes in that congested room. It would not have been fair to leave earlier and let the magician down.

This may well have been a farce from start to finish; I agree. Niklas was either an accomplice and played his part well, or this was a simple case of hysteria, since his mother's conduct had upset him greatly. And as Niklas had gained nothing by acting, so we must conclude that Niklas' subconscious mind, in a tremendous state of frustration at being turned out of his own home, wanted to draw attention to his own unenviable position in the new household that his mother had set up with her boyfriend. The fact remains, however, that from that time Niklas was completely cured. He never again suffered from fits and all the credit went to the black magician, the driver-out-of-evil-spirits, for his wonderful performance. We may regard the whole performance as a smart bit of work, but no other person living in these regions will agree: it was to them clearly and simply a case of possession by evil spirit.

Now let me relate the story of Maria, which is far more difficult to explain. Of course, I cannot give you the lady's real name, but Maria will serve the purpose. She was an Anglo-Indian of slightly less than middle age, respectably married, with four children. A good housewife and a hard worker, she did not care for servants whom she maintained were more a hindrance than a help. And she abhorred mendicants.

Now if there is anything for which India is notorious, it is its beggars ; they swarm everywhere. They throng the roads and accost you in the market-place, and as if that is not enough, they call at your front door and will not go away till you give them alms.

Many such mendicants were in the habit of visiting the house where Maria lived, and among them was one in particular who annoyed her immensely. He was a tall, very black man with long hair and a great black beard that streamed down over his chest. He had the most piercing black eyes she had ever seen. This fellow generally wore the accepted costume of a yogi; a long saffron robe reaching to the ground. It was far from clean, as was also the saffron cloth he wore loosely around his head as an untidy turban. Caste marks of white and red on his forehead, a necklace of large amber beads and a stout staff completed his dress. He was always barefooted.

Maria detested the fellow for two reasons. The first, his arrogant manner of demanding alms. Here was no beggar, he made one feel, but someone whose demand had better be met or … The second reason was more subtle. The man's piercing black eyes seemed to Maria to undress her each time he looked at her. It made her feel as if the clothes she wore—she was invariably a chic dresser—might just as well be dispensed with for all the good they did in hiding her nakedness.

One day Maria was particularly busy and the beggar particularly demanding, with the result that she ordered him to get out. Resenting this, the mendicant argued back, when, true to the habits of almost all Anglo-Indians in this hot country, Maria started to abuse him in no uncertain manner.

The response to this was quite unexpected. The visitor said not a word but just glared at her, and those terrible eyes of his seemed to grow larger and to come closer and closer. Now they appeared but a few inches away, and as Maria stood rooted to the spot, they came yet nearer and the next instant were inside her. Or so it seemed.

A still small voice now spoke to her. It was not that of the magician's which was deep and sonorous. This was a high-pitched, treble voice, the sort of voice one would associate with a boy of eight years or so. And it always laughed before it said anything. Maria was to come to know of this to her cost very soon. Always that high-pitched, cackling, treble laughter before the words came.

'At last,' chortled the childlike voice, 'I have managed to get back into a human body. It has been so many years, so many long years. But at last I have succeeded. You are mine, Maria, and I will never let you go.' The words rose to a crescendo. 'Never will I leave you, nor will I let you leave me, Maria. From this day forth we two shall be one. Husband and wife, my dear. It has been such a long, long time.'

Maria told me this story afterwards and said that from that moment all sense of privacy was lost to her. Never, at any moment, did she feel alone. 'The Voice,' as she called it, was always with her day and night and it was particularly the nights that she dreaded.

As time passed, this demon within her began to make itself more and more felt. It would always be talking to her in its high-pitched, treble voice, making the most obscene suggestions. Worse still it was always laughing. When she undressed or took her bath, it would scream with glee and shout, 'I can see you! I can see you!' When she lay down to sleep at night it would say the filthiest things to her and make the most vulgar suggestions, ending with 'I want you. I must have you.'

Matters grew worse as the Voice began to make its demands more and more pressing. Maria would awaken with a start, a sense of a heavy weight upon her as if somebody was lying on top of her. At other times she would feel herself clasped tightly in a pair of strong invisible arms.

Gradually Maria began to change in her own conduct and nature. She had always been an upright person of good character, but I expect the continuous flow of lewd suggestions and the actions that these suggestions awakened wore Maria down till she herself started to welcome, and finally follow, those continuous promptings. By this

time the people who had known her and noticed the change began to talk about it, and in our town rumours spread rapidly.

Thus it was that I came to hear of Maria, and being always interested in such matters, lost no time in contacting her through the friend who had told me.

Maria did have short respite now and again from the prompting of the Voice, although this was not very often or for long. Luckily, it was on one of those occasions that I first met her and I had time to gain her confidence and hear her story before the Voice suddenly came back and took hold of her. There was no mistaking this, for Maria abruptly stopped speaking to me in mid-sentence and her voice changed to an almost childlike treble lisp: 'How nice of you to visit me. Do come and sit closer, it will be so cosy for both of us.'

Maria was handsome in appearance and of pleasing build and it was easy to understand how her change in habits and her newly acquired intimate and sexy behaviour was going to get her into a lot of trouble. The friends who had told me about her and probably nearly all those who had heard the story were convinced hers was a clear case of possession. The mendicant whom Maria had ordered away so abruptly had laid a curse upon her, one of the worst curses that can be put upon anybody in the East: the curse of obsession by an evil entity or spirit. Millions of people believe in this sort of thing. The events clearly pointed to it. There could be no other possible explanation, they would say.

I have travelled a lot in India in my time, during which period I have never lost an opportunity to investigate, as far as possible, every case of occult happening that has come my way. I have read a lot about these things, met and spoken to a number of black magicians and delved into the matter as deeply as I could. Indeed, I have gone as far as to become initiated into the cult of black magician by preforming certain rites that, under the oath of secrecy, I cannot reveal.

Anyone who has delved into these matters deeply enough and gained sufficient experience develops a sort of uncanny sense for knowing whether a case he may encounter is actually the result of a black magician's spell or not. As I have said already, nearly everything of an abnormal kind that happens in India is attributed to the occult and to black magic, but to those who, like myself, have studied the subject, this is far from being so. A fair percentage of people who suddenly begin to act queerly do so for quite natural reasons. Hysteria plays a very large part in the lives of people in the East, both men and women, but more particularly among women at the time of menstruation and menopause.

Then again, people in the East are far more emotional then those

in the West. Little injuries done to them assume gargantuan proportions, and they brood and brood over their wrong till, quite frequently, their minds give way. At best, there is but a narrow margin in the minds of us all between sanity and insanity, and it does not take very much or very long for that small barrier to break down and the same to become insane, at least to some degree or in certain ways. So before attributing anything to occult influence, we should not fail to consider whether suggestion and autosuggestion may have played a part in influencing the person concerned to act in a given manner. Repeated and powerful suggestions upon the subconscious mind of practically any ordinary individual will soon cause that person to act in the way intended while hypnotism, which is after all but a well-harnessed form of suggestion, undoubtedly acts as a most powerful factor.

Hypnotism, powerful and almost instantaneous, is an art well-known and widely practised in India by some pseudo-yogis and other interested persons, and I felt certain Maria's case fell entirely into this category. She had repeatedly stressed that the mendicant's piercing black eyes seemed to bore right through her, to undress her, as she said, to the point that she felt it was useless for her to wear any clothing. His gaze and his concentrated silence had brought her under his hypnotic influence undoubtedly, and she was but carrying out in practice the suggestions he had forced upon her.

The only solution was to break that hypnotic spell, but to do so successfully would require an indirect approach. I knew it would be useless for me to tell her that she had been hypnotised and that I would try to remove the hypnotic influence that had been brought to bear upon her. Without doubt, one of the first commands her visitor had given her under his spell was to resist any suggestion that he was influencing her. I would have to hypnotise her myself without her knowing what was happening, and then put the counter-suggestions required to nullify the orders of the mendicant.

Luckily I was wearing my heavy silver ring, set with a blue stone, a gift to me from a close friend from Ghana, so I decided to play upon Maria's clear belief that she had been bewitched by using this belief to hypnotise her.

'Maria,' I began, 'I am wearing a ring that has come all the way from Ghana in Africa. It belongs to a very powerful witch-doctor who gave it to me. Now, if you will stare at the blue stone on this ring without closing your eyes, I will invoke the magic that is in the ring to free you of your trouble for all time.'

Maria was a simple sort of woman, obviously not well read, and the mendicant's suggestion in the form of the Voice continued its cackling, followed with a lewd suggestion each time, for many

minutes, while I persisted with my magic ring. But at last she quietened down and agreed to look at the ring. Removing it from my finger, I laid the ring upon a small table that I placed close before her.

I asked her to stare at it without blinking her eyes. Maria then started to do as I had asked.

At first her gaze would wander, but I brought it back each time till I finally succeeded in rivetting her attention upon the blue stone. Slowly I made the sleep suggestion and in a surprisingly short while Maria was sound asleep under my hypnotic influence.

The rest was easy. I made the counter suggestions required to nullify the mendicant's earlier commands and continued for some time, till I felt my orders had supplanted the mendicant's earlier evil commands. I told her that never again would she be troubled by the Voice. That had been only her own imagination. She had never heard any such voice. There never had been a voice. It had been a nasty dream. Entirely her own imagination. No such thing as a Voice! I then woke her up.

The lady, as I have told you, was basically a good woman and I am glad to be able to record that she was quite cured from that moment. No longer did she hear the high-pitched treble voice (which, incidentally, was her own voice pitched to a treble key under hypnotic instruction), urging her to do and speak obscene things. No longer did it speak to her night and day. Maria had been freed and neither the devil nor any evil spirits had played any part in entering into her.

Nevertheless, I have come across some well-authenticated cases of spirit-possession and I will now tell you about one of these. I have already mentioned the case of Ossie Brown in some detail in my earlier book, *The Call of the Man-Eater*. The story begins in much the same way as Maria's. A fakir in a yellow robe was wont to present himself on the first day of every month at the pay-counter of the premises where Ossie was working and demand alms from him and the other members of staff as they received their salaries.

In time, Ossie resented this peremptory attitude and threatened to hand the man over to the police. Hot words followed, ending with the fakir cursing Ossie and a statement that he would put 'someone' into my friend who would take up his abode there and remain till death.

That very night Ossie awoke with the curious sensation that he was not alone. He opened his eyes to see a dark figure outside his mosquito net. The figure came closer and closer and appeared to merge with him by actually getting inside him. Thereafter, Ossie started exhibiting strange mannerisms at work. His voice and behaviour would change. Apparently he did not know where he was, or who he was. He would ask gruffly how he came to be there. Then he would walk out of the room. Sometimes he would return after a

lapse of thirty minutes or an hour quite oblivious of his behaviour or of how he left his work spot. Occasionally he would collapse, as if in a fit. When he recovered, he was quite normal and was very surprised at being told of his behaviour.

Just about this time, rather foolishly, I invited Ossie on a trip to the jungle. We camped that night on the banks of a great river, far from human habitation. A herd of wild elephants was grazing close by. We could hear them trumpeting and breaking the branches off trees, and we lit a large camp fire to keep away any stray elephants that might come our way. Suddenly, a strange gruff voice addressed me, demanding to know who I was. It came from Ossie, but as I looked at him I saw quite another person looking back at me. The eyes, the face, everything was different. This entity repeated his demand. Who was I? Where were we?

I tried to pacify Ossie by saying we had come out shooting, whereupon he demanded that I should give him my gun. Fortunately, he did not notice that my rifle was against a tree directly behind him. I knew that if he got hold of it he might shoot me. So distracting his attention to the elephant, I pounced upon the weapon and threatened to shoot him if he came any closer.

Regardless of my threat, he advanced upon me. I knew only too well that in a physical struggle I would be no match for this person, evil spirit or not. I would be compelled to shoot and at least wound my friend and that would not be an easy thing to do with a heavy calibre .405 rifle.

When he was only five feet away the solution came to me. I fired the rifle so that the bullet just whizzed over his head. Ossie halted abruptly, shuddered and passed a hand over his forehead wearily. The next second the possessing entity had gone and my friend spoke to me in his normal voice.

The sequel to this story is that Ossie went to Calcutta where, one day, he threw himself from the second floor of a building and was killed. To me this case was a clear example of spirit-possession. You will notice it differed from Maria's in one very important fact. Maria fancied she heard a voice in her own head telling her to do things. She did not change or act differently herself. By that I mean her personality remained the same. In Ossie's case the change was in himself, physically as well as outwardly. His manner, appearance and voice all changed in the twinkling of an eye. Secondly, Maria could always remember what the inner voice, prompting her, had said. In Ossie's case he was quite ignorant of all that had happened to him and could remember nothing.

The reason for the difference appears obvious. Maria's conscious and subconscious minds were overshadowed by the orders of the

mendicant, delivered while she was under hypnosis and in his control. Nevertheless it was Maria's own conscious and subconscious minds that were functioning under the orders of an outsider disguised under an assumed identity of a childlike, treble voice. With Ossie, both his conscious and subconscious minds were not only dominated, but temporarily taken possession of by quite another identity, this time a discarnate entity under the orders of the fakir, who must have been a powerful medium as well as master of black magic. As a result, Ossie's conscious and subconscious minds were not functioning at all at the time and so he remembered nothing of what had taken place.

There are quite a number of persons living in India today who perform each day, and sometimes several times in the course of each day, the miracle of what are known in spiritualistic parlance as 'the phenomenon of apports'.

In the darkness, or the dim red illumination in the seance room, spiritualists claim that small objects such as flowers or other trivial articles are brought to them by the spirits and laid upon their laps even though all doors and windows have been closed. The mystics of India go much farther than this. To begin with, they operate in broad daylight, in an open space, sometimes with hundreds of people looking on.

Sai Baba the reincarnated, generally referred to as Sathya Sai, who is a personal friend whom I have known as a lad and who claims to be the reincarnation of the original Sai Baba the great who died many years ago, once stretched out his hand in front of me and closed it over a little metal image which appeared to materialise and his fingers were closing upon it! Baba, as he is affectionately referred to by his personal acquaintances, gave it to me as a keepsake and I put the little figure in my purse.

Years later a pickpocket relieved me of this purse, with my money and the figurine inside, as I was boarding the last night-bus from Bangalore to Whitefield, twelve miles away, where I was living at the time. I knew nothing of the theft at the time, but about halfway to my destination the conductor came round collecting tickets. I put my hand into my pocket for my purse.

It was gone! Worse still, I did not have another coin on my person.

Yet there was something small and hard in the corner of that pocket. I felt again and drew out the small figurine that Baba had given me. It had been inside one of the compartments of the missing purse. The purse itself had been taken. How had the little image come back into the pocket?

The conductor was looking hard at me. Suspicion came into his face when I withdrew my hand, empty except for the tiny figure between my fingers. The conductor pulled the cord to stop the bus.

We were about seven miles from Whitefield and it was five minutes to midnight. Moreover, it was raining. I had the prospect of a long walk before me.

I explained that my pocked had been picked. The conductor grinned sardonically; 'Tell that to the Marines,' he said in the local dialect. Only, having never heard of the Marines, he used another name in its place, a very rude word with a very, very dirty meaning that I cannot possibly repeat. Then his eyes fell upon the figurine. His manner changed. He pulled the cord twice, which was the signal for the driver to proceed.

'We'll risk it,' he said. 'No inspector is likely to check at this time of night.'

I thanked that conductor when I alighted from the bus. He confided that he was a devotee of Baba's. I have often wondered whether Baba, when he produced the figurine out of the air that day and gave it to me, knew what good purpose it was to serve in saving me from a long, wet, midnight walk.

The second time I went to Baba was when I was in a spot of real trouble. Before I could ask him, he told me my trouble. He also told me what were to be the consequences. He gave me that answer nearly thirteen years ago and everything he said came to pass exactly. Before parting, he stretched out his hand for me to shake. As he did so, I noticed that he closed his fingers over something. Then he handed me a small piece of ash.

'Keep it in a small box, carefully,' he advised. 'Should you have any trouble at any time, or a problem, open the box and look upon the ashes. Picture my face in the ashes. I think your trouble, or problem, whatever it is, will disappear very soon after that.'

I did exactly as Baba had told me. I cannot say I have been trouble-free. But whatever my trouble, they have since turned out to be but little ones. And I still have that box with the ashes in it.

However, this is a digression. The question is, how do people like Baba get these apports? There seem to be only two solutions. The first is obvious. Trickery, in the form of sleight-of-hand. Something that our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers have seen on the stage for years. The second solution defies explanation.

Let us consider trickery first. Did Baba successfully 'palm' the figurine and the ashes upon me, right under my nose, without my noticing how he did it? I deny it, but what is the use of arguing? So let me tell you some of the other occurrences which he brought to pass. You will then be in a better position to judge whether 'palming' could have been possible.

A sick girl was brought to him. She had been suffering from a permanent headache for months. By apport, Baba produced a small

bottle of very strongly scented balm. The first application of this balm upon her forehead cured that headache for good.

Baba was once invited to an alfresco tea-party. The tables were spread beneath a grove of large and beautiful mango trees. The month was November. No fruit grows on mango trees in November. April to June are the months for mangoes in India.

Somebody remarked, 'What a pity there are no mangoes now.' To which Baba replied, 'But there are.' In his hand was a stalk, to which three ripe mangoes and a couple of leaves were attached.

One more incident. Baba was travelling by car from Bangalore to his permanent abode in Puttaparthi. Short of his destination by about fifty miles, the car stopped. The driver had not put sufficient petrol into the tank. They would either have to beg some passing lorry for petrol, or Baba must go by bus for the rest of the journey.

Baba stepped out of the car, walked to the rear and stretched the palm of his hand over the petrol tank. Then he reseated himself. 'Drive on,' he instructed. 'We now have enough petrol to complete the journey.' And they had.

So, if these things are not done by sleight-of-hand, how are they done? At least, how do people in India say they are done?

There are two current explanations. Basically, they amount to the same thing, although in *modus operandi* they are quite dissimilar. The general opinion is that the apports are brought to the master desiring them through the agency of what are known as 'Kutti shaitans', diminutive little sprites generally invisible, but which at times take on the appearance of tiny, naked, very black people, no more than six inches in height and of both sexes. The number of *Kutti-shaitans* in the band that serves him or her depend on the degree of occult power possessed by the master and it may vary from a single one to two dozen.

Elaborate methods are prescribed as to how a person may gain control over one or more of these little elfs, but they are said to be quite dangerous people once you have anything to do with them. The trouble is that when you set yourself to acquire one or more of them, they in turn acquire you and the contract is for life; you cannot revoke it at any period, and if you try to do so the direst of repercussions await you in the form of great misfortune, sickness and eventual death. Moreover, the sprites do not serve you for nothing: they will obey you and get you what you want, provided you in turn agree to their terms and give them what they want. And their terms and wants are always of a horrid nature.

Once a week, mostly on Fridays, but with some magicians on Thursdays, time must be set apart at midnight on which these payments are to be made to the little sprites in a room specially

appointed for the purpose. Blood is frequently demanded: pig's blood, the blood of a black cock, human blood from a vein in your own or somebody else's arm, or menstrual blood. Sprites of a lower order demand that you commit the greatest sacrilege against the dictates of your own religion, whatever it may be, by saying things, doing things and submitting religious objects to deeds that are the most blasphemous possible.

Nor is that all. No master may marry. If he wants to cohabit with a woman he must first get permission from his Kutti shaitans to do so. This is only bestowed after incurring a heavy penalty. Financially, the master can never be in abundant circumstances. He will receive only enough money to live in moderate comfort. Never may he become rich.

To acquire one of these sprites, he must first become a black magician of which there are many orders. Actually to capture the sprite he is required to visit a buffalo-kraal at midnight on the night of the *Amavasa*, which is the darkest night of the month, exactly halfway between full moon and the succeeding new moon. He should hide himself in a corner of the kraal along with the buffaloes, arriving at least an hour before midnight. When the time comes and the hour strikes, if he looks earnestly enough he will generally notice something rather like a big moth or a small bat flitting about on the back of one of the buffaloes. The seeker should approach it quietly and make snatching motions with his arms and hands, as if trying to seize this flitting creature.

Of course he would never really be able to seize a sprite. His motions are only symbolical and signify his earnest desire and intention to succeed.

The sprite, or Kutti shaitan, will then speak to him, normally by means of mental rather than spoken conversation.

'What are you trying to do?' it will ask.

'I mean to capture you,' the seeker will reply.

'Why? What do you want of me?' the sprite will ask.

'I mean to catch and conquer you. I want you for my servant; to do my bidding and get me whatever I may desire.' The seeker is required to be very firm and positive in this assertion.

The sprite may remonstrate at first, or begin to bargain straightaway. Often it may lay down extremely difficult, if not quite impossible, conditions in return for its services. The seeker is strongly advised to refuse straightaway and then to try to drive as hard a bargain as possible, for he must remember that, once it is made, the pact is sealed for the rest of his lifetime. It may never be broken, renounced or cancelled. Many instances are on record of black magicians who, for one reason or another, but principally for the sake

of contracting a marriage, have tried to nullify their agreements with their Kutti-shaitans, either by straightforward renunciation or trickery. The direst penalties have befallen them in the way of misfortune, sickness, loss of sight or limbs, or even death. So you should really think twice before you enter into an agreement of this sort, even if it is your own self that is able to bring you so many nice things.

The other common belief, and this is more prevalent in northern India than in the south, is that the familiar who brings the apports, and is known by the name of the *hamzad*, is merely your own astral self, resembling you in every way, including appearance, mannerisms and even clothing. The *hamzad* is believed to be capable of travelling to the ends of the earth in the twinkling of an eye, of carrying enormous weights and of being able to do anything for you and get you whatever you want. It is understood of course that everything the *hamzad* brings is made invisible in course of transit and is made to resume its substantial appearance when the *hamzad* presents it to his master.

You are required to work hard before you can capture the services of your *hamzad*. This is done by following certain very secret formulae. As in the case of the Kutti-shaitan, a two-way bargain must be entered into between the seeker and his *hamzad* for service to be rendered and this bargain is mandatory for life. Penalties of the most frightful character, including the violent termination of the seeker's life, follow the breaking of this pact by the human partner.

It may be interesting to note certain fundamental differences as well as some basic similarities, between western black magic and the Indian brand of black magic.

The main difference seems to lie in the fact that, European black magicians, generally known as wizards and witches, more or less make undisguised covenants with Lucifer, the spirit of the morning, and other terms synonymous with Satan, or more commonly, the devil; the Indian black magician will very stoutly deny that the devil ('shaitan' being the name in Hindi and 'pey' or 'pisachee' in Tamil) plays any part in the bargain. Kutti-shaitans, or the *hamzad* or, on some occasions a particular spirit variously known as a '*minispuram*' in the south and in western India as a 'raksha', are the entities invoked for this purpose and they are by no means considered to be devils, nor do they bear any resemblance to one. The Indian seer firmly believes that he is dealing with one or more very powerful spirits who are definitely not of an evil disposition, although they may at times be tempted or driven to outbursts of the most severe anger or revengefulness, or plain malevolence. He will very strongly deny that he is having any truck with the devil and will become most indignant if you insist that this is so.

At the same time, considering that the aims of the two schools are about the same, while the result attained are more or less equal, one cannot but wonder whether the devil or any other spirit, has really anything to do with it. Of course, the westerner will claim that the devil and the *minispuram* or spirit are one and the same. The Indian will stoutly deny it: his *minispuram* is far from being a devil.

Maybe, however, the much maligned devil and the greatly feared *minispuram* have nothing whatever to do with it, and that it is the black magician's, or the witch's own subconscious mind that is at the bottom of the whole affair, assuming and playing the part of the devil or the *minispuram*, just to satisfy its owner?

It will be noticed that in all cases a bargain is mandatory. Without this pledge on the part of the black magician on the one hand and the entity on the other, no deal can transpire, no pact may be made. Why is this so? The religious-minded person will claim that by striking a pact of this kind, the devil will win over the witch's soul to himself, with eventual damnation and hell. The black magician of India will say that his *minispuram* must naturally require, and receive, some sort of reward and satisfaction for his labours on his master's behalf.

May it not also be a fact that the existence of a pact serves to remind the magician always of his contacts with the other side, the devil or spirit who is under an obligation to him and to whom he is equally beholden every moment of the day and night? The pact serves to rivet the attention of conscious and subconscious minds at all times.

Therein lie the essential ingredients that make black magic work: the strong awareness on the part of both the conscious and subconscious minds of the magician, western or eastern, that he has struck a bargain with some supernatural power possessing the attributes of ability and willingness to work for him with assured success, and get him what he wants, in return for the possession of his very self. The magician and this power thus become welded into one force, as it were, and this thought is with him at all times, giving him a boost of selfconscious assertiveness and confidence in himself that he would not normally possess.

Conversely, all self-assertiveness and self-confidence completely disappear in a victim in India, even if he should by nature have these attributes, when he finds himself pitted against a black magician. Generations of upbringing together with the frightening tales drilled into him from childhood, make him quite certain that he is absolutely helpless before the man of magic and is entirely in his power.

Thus we have a person all filled with confidence in a supernatural power that is helping him day and night, opposed to another who has known from childhood that he is helpless against a foe who has supernatural assistance. The result is a foregone conclusion and the

man of magic always wins.

Latent hypnotism plays a major part in both the casting and removal of 'spells' in India. Everyone has heard of 'mantras' and 'mantrams', words used in relation to magical formulae of one kind or another. The words are identical in meaning and apply to everything from coherent sentences, uttered either in ancient Sanskrit or in the local vernacular (it should be remembered that there are about three hundred vernaculars in use throughout India and Pakistan) in either prose or poetry, to incoherent and meaningless phrases. Mantras are employed to bring good luck, employment, a suitable partner in marriage, a male child, protection against sickness or danger, a cure for any sickness and for a host of other purposes. In fact, their employment is practically synonymous with the use of talismans, but with a rather wider range.

It is the repetition of such a mantra, over and over again, that serves to focus the attention upon a particular purpose or objective. It serves to keep the mind from straying away from that purpose or objective. Thus one attains a determination, together with a large degree of autosuggestion, which in itself is nothing but auto- or self-hypnotism.

A third factor is also present ; a great impelling desire, coupled with great personal emotion. The person is all worked up, in all his being, to achieve and to acquire what he wants. So we have here the ingredients necessary for attaining success in any field. Firstly determination, the great driving factor; secondly, a great desire to attain it, a sort of burning need for it; thirdly, belief or faith that what is being striven for will be achieved; and fourthly, great emotion to keep the mind and nerves stretched.

The mantrams of the East are, therefore, a very clever way to apply in practice all the four great rules of 'How to Get What You Want in Life', and would appear in any normal person as nothing more.

But, does this explanation apply to every case? Let me relate a true story to which thousands now living in India will testify.

Shri Narsiah was a humble stationmaster of the very unimportant railway station at Polreddipalayam on the Southern Railway in the state of Andhra Pradesh. But this humble and self-effacing man was the means of saving the lives of hundreds of persons bitten by poisonous snakes, including cobras, vipers and the deadly kraits. Should anyone be bitten by a poisonous snake anywhere in India, it was only necessary to send a telegram to Shri Narsiah at his station mentioning the name and address of the afflicted person. People in those parts are extremely poor and most can hardly afford to pay the cost of an express telegram. With this in mind, there is an unspoken

understanding in the minds of the telegraphists throughout the region. When such a message is handed in, everyone handling the message, as well as the telegraphists receiving it, gives the message priority over every other telegram, even 'express' messages, however important they maybe. So we could expect Shri Narsiah to receive the telegram in a reasonably short time. Nevertheless, so terribly fast does the bite of a cobra work that the patient would be near to death anyway.

Growing to one side of the single platform at Polreddipalayam railway station is quite a short tree. It is a very peculiar tree indeed, different from all others. For it is a sacred tree and is the means by which the cobra's victim, perhaps a thousand miles away, can be saved from death. This little tree is festooned with small pieces of white rag, tied to every conceivable part of it within reach. Those little pieces of white cloth are torn from corners of Shri Narsiah's *dhoties*, or ankle-length *loinclothes*, for the stationmaster does not wear trousers of the ordinary western style. He is a high-caste Brahmin and bears caste-marks upon his forehead. The climate is hot and he is barebodied invariably but his *loincloth*, wound tightly around his waist and extending to his ankles is his stock-in-trade for curing snakebites wherever they may occur.

Each time Shri Narsiah receives a snakebite telegram, he hastens to the little sacred tree, tears a strip of about six to eight inches from the bottom corner of his *dhoti*, ties it to a branch of the tree and mutters a secret mantra half aloud. The snake, provided it has not already been killed, is said to die at this instant. Narsiah then goes back to his work as stationmaster in the little cabin which is his office as if nothing untoward has happened. Maybe a thousand miles away the patient, lying on the ground in a coma with saliva dripping from the corners of his mouth, and with only a few moments more to live, suddenly opens his eyes, sits up and then stands erect. He has been completely cured!

Bear in mind that the victim was unconscious, at death's door. He certainly could not practise hypnotism not could he be hypnotised. Nor could he indulge in autosuggestion, not even in prayer. He could not do anything, for that matter, to help himself.

In distant Polreddpalayam, Shri Narsiah, interrupted in his duties, certainly did not waste time on any such practices. He had simply hurried to the tree, torn a strip from the lower end of his *dhoti* and uttered a mantra while he tied that strip to the tree. Then he returned to his duties. And the patient recovered!

If you were to ask Shri Narsiah how it was done, I do not think he will tell you.

At one time of my life I worked in the Telegraph Department for nearly thirteen years, and I transmitted many such messages to Shri

Narsiah. To satisfy my curiosity, I have subsequently telegraphed the snake's victim at the address given on the distress message. In every single case the man had been cured! What is more to the point, I was bitten by a cobra myself and a telegram was sent to Shri Narsiah on my behalf.

I had just returned from duty. The time was about 3 p.m. A hue and cry was suddenly raised by one of our tenants. 'Snake!' She screamed. Then, as she saw the spectacled hood, 'Cobra! Cobra!'

I had been catching snakes since I was eight years old and so thought nothing of it. Without difficulty I secured the cobra by grabbing its tail, while I put a stick across the back of its head. Quickly releasing the tail, I transferred my grip to the back of the cobra's neck. Then I lifted it up. The snake was completely helpless. I carried it to the box I generally keep ready for such eventualities and was in the act of throwing it in when the snake wound the free end of its tail around my other arm. It was quite a long specimen for a cobra. A female, if I remember correctly.

As the snake restricted my movements I was unable to open the lid of the box, so I called my servant-boy (known as a 'chokra') to remove the tail that was coiled around my arm.

The chokra started to do so timidly when the cobra transferred its tail-coils to the boy's wrist. He panicked, he gave a violent jerk to free his wrist and in doing so wrenched the head of the cobra from between my fingers. That reptile was fast, and before I could act, it had buried its fangs in the ball of my thumb.

I threw the wretched cobra into the box, closed the lid, and as I did not have too much faith in mantrams and stationmasters, hastened in my car to the local hospital for an antivenine injection.

But my people at home had firm faith in Shri Narsiah, and as the telegraph office was but two furlongs distant, the telegram to him was on its way before I reached the hospital.

There was considerable confusion when I told the nurse at the emergency section what had happened. She said I must see the duty doctor and went in search of him. The doctor came back with her and asked what had happened. I told him. He asked whether I was certain it was a snake. Finally, he went in search of the serum.

He came back looking rather bothered. Apparently the hospital had run out of stock. He told me to hurry to another hospital which was over two miles away. I was feeling giddy by now with a pain in my thumb and hand. I got into the car and made for the other hospital, where I was given 10 cc of antivenine serum intravenously.

But my people had sent a reply-paid telegram to Shri Narsiah and to this he had replied, 'Don't worry. Patient cured. Snake dead.' The hospital detained me for about four hours to see how I fared. Except

for severe urticaria set up through serum reaction, I felt more or less none the worse for my experience. The giddiness had passed and there was no pain in the region of the bite.

Finally I returned home and was handed Narsiah's reply. I read it and went directly for the box where I had put the cobra. I opened the box. The snake inside was quite dead. Not only dead, coiled up inside as rigid and stiff as if it had been made of metal.

How and why did that cobra die? It had not been injured by me or by anyone else. Also, it takes at least twenty-four hours for a dead snake to become so rigid. In this case only four hours had passed, yet the cobra had become so rigid that I could not uncoil it again, although I tried.

Not a very good case, it may be said, because I had been given the injection after the telegram had been sent. I should have waited for the stationmaster to act. But who would have done so in the circumstances? In any case, why did the cobra die? Why did it stiffen so soon?

Almost everyone who has lived in India for any length of time will be able to tell you instances of black magic. They abound in every corner of the land.

Sammy Soanes was a friend of mine. He had originally come from Goa then a Portuguese possession, and had bought a small property and settled down in Bangalore. A gentleman from Malabar bought the neighbouring house and moved in with quite a large household. Quarrels started between Sammy's people and the neighbours. My friend was of a quiet, non-interfering disposition, but these quarrels reached a pitch when he was compelled to make a police report as well as take legal proceedings.

Now his neighbour, the man from Malabar, although a recent-comer, had already become notorious as a black magician. He called Sammy to the stone wall that separated their respective properties and told him flatly that if he did not withdraw both cases against him forthwith, he (the neighbour) would make Sammy bedridden for life.

Sammy laughed at him. The man from Malabar turned on his heels and walked away.

As I have said, Sammy was a good-tempered soul. He forgot about the incident in a couple of hours and that night went to bed at his usual early hour. But he could not rise early the following morning. He could not get out of bed at all, for he was unable to raise himself. He was paralysed from the waist downwards.

Panic seized him as he remembered the happenings of the previous day. Mrs Soanes, who had overheard the neighbour's threats, pleaded with her husband to allow her to carry his abject apologies to the man from Malabar. Perhaps he would be merciful and forgive. Then

Sammy would be able to get out of bed once more.

There is a strange quality that docile persons possess. You can drive them just so far, but suddenly they will reach a point when they can be driven no further. The neighbour's threats had reached that point. Sammy refused to apologise. Instead, he urgently summoned a Nambodripad, also from the West Coast of India, who was a personal friend and had settled down in Bangalore a couple of years earlier.

Krishnan, Sammy's friend, duly answered the summons and declared at once that the neighbour was responsible for Sammy's paralysis. He said, after some further consideration, that the magic used to bring about Sammy's incapacity was the work of a powerful 'yaksha'. So powerful, indeed, that his own familiar was not strong enough to undo it and put Sammy upon his feet again. What he could do, however, was to bring a similar spell to bear upon the neighbour, so that he would become paralysed himself and confined to his bed in turn.

Sammy gave the green signal to this and by the same evening the man next door suddenly lost his power to stand upright and within the hour found that he, in turn, could not move from the waist downwards. This led to a sort of contest in casting spells between this nasty neighbour and Sammy's Nambodripad friend, working on behalf of Sammy, in which the latter very definitely came off much the worse. Sammy was stricken with high fever, was unable to eat or drink, and the paralytic stroke that had afflicted him showed no signs of abating. He had to be fed intravenously. The neighbour, on the other hand, had managed to overcome the Nambodripad's spell and was back on his feet again.

It was at this stage that Mrs Soanes, unknown to her husband, visited the black magician next door to beg his pardon. When he opened the door to let her in, he remarked 'I knew you would come. It was just a matter of time.'

This man was a haughty fellow and spurned her apologies for a long time. Finally he agreed to remove the spell and restore Sammy to health in return for a sum of five hundred rupees, the full amount be paid in cash and in advance.

Mrs Soanes never doubted for a moment that he would keep to his terms. But where was she to lay hands on five hundred rupees without her husband's knowledge? Then she remembered the heavy gold chain lying at the bottom of her steel trunk. That and two gold bracelets she had bought after years and years of hard labour and saving.

She took the article to Borilal, the local moneylender. They were worth over two thousand rupees, but after much pleading and begging, that skinflint agreed to give her six hundred rupees in loan, although he did not actually present her with this amount in cash.

Rather, he deducted the full interest for one month which he claimed came to just one hundred rupees, in advance, and gave the balance of five hundred rupees to his client.

Mrs Soanes hastened to her neighbour's house and timidly knocked at his door. After a while the black magician answered her summons. He nodded perfunctorily and allowed her to enter. Gruffly he commanded, 'Give me the money.'

Meekly, Mrs Soanes handed over five hundred rupees in notes. The man counted the money. Then he rudely dismissed her, saying, 'You may go. Your husband will be able to stand by this evening.'

Mrs Soanes did not dare to ask any questions, but almost fled from that awful presence. As the sun set that evening, Sammy suddenly told his wife that he felt well again, and to substantiate his words he scrambled to his feet. Mrs Soanes never told him about her chain and bracelets. She was too poor to redeem the articles, so she had to fake a burglary and say they had been stolen. Sammy believed her.

This story is true. I knew Sammy Soanes personally for years and visited him when he was paralysed. At that time he told me about the spell cast by his neighbour, and his own friend's (the Nambodripad's) unsuccessful efforts to free him. Mrs Soanes told me the rest in confidence, later on.

I do not wish to repeat myself, but there is a case of my own which I have related in an earlier book. A person who knew this art took a dislike for me. As a result I was awakened around 3 a.m. for several days with a feeling of being choked by a heavy weight upon my chest. I also heard measured footsteps outside my window, but there was never anybody there. Upon a whim, I consulted a local magician, who is very famous in my home town. Before I could speak, he told me the exact purpose of my visit. He also told me to go home, measure a certain distance from my window and dig down into the earth a certain depth. I was to destroy what I found there, whereupon I would be left in peace.

I measured out the stated distance, dug down the required depth, and found a small effigy with hair fastened to it. That hair looked remarkably like my own. I destroyed the effigy and was never troubled again.

I could relate many more tales of this sort, but they would become boring. It is sufficient to impress the fact that the people of India and especially those in the south of this peninsula, are brought up with black magic as an acknowledged fact from their earliest days. Nobody would ever think to question or doubt the reality; black magic is so involved in everyday life in this land that hardly any adult male of any community, other than westerners—who are considered not to believe in anything anyway—will go out alone after nine or ten o'

clock at night until about five o'clock in the morning, by which hour evil spirits are considered to have gone to rest.

To carry pork, raw or cooked, after sunset is to invite being struck down by an evil entity. This is more so if you happen to be walking barefoot. It is safe, however, to carry pork provided you also carry a piece of charcoal. The devil will then leave you alone.

Members of certain tribes and communities are accredited with being steeped in magic from their childhood and the average Indian will avoid having anything to do with such a person, as if he had the plague. Three of these communities (actually they are part of particular tribes of aborigines who have been in the land from the beginning of time so to speak) come to my mind. They all speak the Telugu dialect and belong to what is now the state of Andhra Pradesh, located in the centre of southern India. These tribes are the Theyli Marajas, who speak Urdu as well, the Koya Mamas, and the Dawa-Lokey (Dawa means medicine and 'Lokey' means people. Hence 'people who give medicine', literally 'medicine men').

All three of these tribes have woven a strong superstition around themselves in the course of generations. When they walk down a village street, children run inside and adults close and fasten their doors. All of them live as mendicants, but they are mendicants with a difference. These people do not beg humbly for food, clothing and money. They demand these things and present their demands under open threat of reprisals if they are not met, so that few dare to deny them.

The Theyli Marajas dress in loose *jabbars* (kneelength shirts), covering *dhoties* wrapped around each leg individually, and wear turbans ending in a decorative fan above their heads, with the other end hanging down their backs. Falling over the shirt, both back and front, is a sort of apron reaching from shoulder to ankles. They carry small, two-stringed violins, consisting of a tin or box body with a bamboo extension, the tin or box employed being gaily decorated with cowrie shells. There is no bow to this instrument and no attempt is made to play it. Apparently it is not intended to produce music, but rather to announce the arrival of its owner, who plucks the strings with his fingernails. The resultant 'ting-ting' announces that a Theyli Maraja has come, and people hastily get something ready to give him in the way of grain or money to induce him to depart as quickly as possible.

These people are professional palmists, and in return for the gifts they receive will tell fortunes with surprising accuracy. So clever are they, in fact, that most people would rather not have their fortunes told for fear of hearing of coming sickness or early death. Rather they present their gifts hastily and invite the wandering Maraja to be on his

way.

The Koya Mamas are a tall, very dark tribe of mostly lean men with coal-black, piercing eyes. They wear long hair, rolled up in a coil upon their heads and decorated with peacocks' feathers or a long-toothed comb. Invariably bare-bodied, with strings of gaily-coloured glass beads, they wear a long, tightly-fitting *dhoti* in the manner of a skirt. Another division of this tribe hails from the wilder parts of the country. Its representatives wear little or no clothing, except for a short *loincloth*. These people decorate their arms with amulets and bracelets made from the roots of trees or carved from bone, wear necklaces made from the coloured seeds of wild plants and trees. As beggars they are very demanding and have the knack of rubbing the base of the palms of both hands together when soliciting alms, while rapidly announcing: 'Look, it's coming soon … See, it's on its way … Soon, now. Very very soon it will be here … Ah, I can see it now; there just there. Oh there, come, come this way.'

The people from whom they are begging, when they hear these words, attach great significance to what, or whom, the 'It' mentioned by the Koya Mama might be, and hastily force a gift upon him, inviting him to go and visit the neighbour next door.

The Koya Mamas have a further knack of introducing a strand of horse hair between the heels of their palms when they rub them together. A tiny charm is attached to this hair; after vigorous rubbing the strand seeks to unravel itself, thus causing the little charm literally to dance on the Koya Mama's palm. If you give him a rupee, he will present you with this charm (minus the horsehair of course) as a very lucky keepsake.

The Dawa Lokey generally send their womenfolk out to beg, even this task being considered beneath their menfolk, apart from being too strenuous. These women wear no jackets, but move from house to house barebreasted and dressed in single-coloured cotton sarees. Their 'doctor's bag' consists of a quilted cloth with the four corners meeting together over a short stick, which they carry across their shoulders in the manner of a gun. Inside the cloth is an assortment of roots, herbs and powders in small boxes. This forms their pharmacopoeia. There is no illness for which they have no cure, and they will try to impress one by answering in a different language from the one by which they are addressed. Should one happen to be conversant with this second language and answer in that dialect, the medicine-woman will then try third.

These itinerant doctresses announce their arrival at your front door in peculiar singsong voices with the words 'Dawa Lokey' repeated over and over again. Strictly speaking they are not beggars, as they earn their living by dispensing their herbal medicines. Depending upon the

sagacity of the individual concerned, some of the roots and leave and powders they sell are singularly efficacious.

Every married couple in India desires to have children. This for two reasons. The first and most important because to be childless carries a great stigma on the wife as barren and incapable of bearing offspring. Very few people stop to consider that it might be the man who is to blame, and not the woman, for it is at once taken for granted that the woman is barren, and barrenness in India is a terrible affliction. It is thought that the gods are unfavourably disposed to such a woman; maybe she is immoral and has lost the capacity to bear offspring, or maybe she is diseased. But whatever the reason the poor woman gets all the blame and she, not her husband, is looked down upon with a mixture of pity and contempt, and suffers too, from the attitude of superiority among her fertile neighbours.

The other reason for this fear of childlessness is, of course, the desire for the continuation of the family, and for this reason it is a son who is desired and not a daughter.

There is in India a vast difference between having a son and having a daughter, and if a man is lucky enough to be the father of a number of sons he is considered to be on top of the world. For each of the sons, at the time of marriage, brings in a dowry. This dowry generally takes the form of a couple of thousand rupees or more, jewellery, land, a house or lower down the scale a car, a radio-set or transistor, or maybe a pair of gold rings or an automatic gold watch.

If, on the other hand, the man is unfortunate enough to have a daughter for whom he has to find a husband, that man is at the other end of the stick. For it is he who will have to do all dowry-giving to the bridegroom, who gives nothing in return, and if that man is unfortunate enough to be the father of several daughters he is indeed undone, as he will have to part with as many dowries as he has daughters. Nor will he be able to dodge the issue by keeping his daughters unmarried. To have even one daughter unmarried carries with it a fearful disgrace, for everyone will say that she is a bad girl and not a virgin; hence nobody will marry her. To have a number of unmarried daughters is to reach the bottom in public esteem. No girl is allowed to marry until her elder sister is married before her. Hence, if the father is poor and cannot afford to pay the required dowries, none of his daughters can marry and they are all dubbed as prostitutes, for to the person in the street there is only one reason for any girl to remain unmarried. Otherwise, surely someone or the other would have come forward to marry her. The reason why nobody has done so must surely be that the girl, and very likely her whole family, are immoral. The question that the father might be too poor to pay the dowries is conveniently overlooked.

As a consequence of this custom, the parents of every boy try to get a wife for him who brings the highest dowry. Conversely, the parents of a girl must look for a boy whose parents, in their turn, are prepared to accept a dowry of as little as the girl's parents can afford. And it is all left to the parents of both sides to bargain and barter. The boy and girl have no say in the matter, or in the choosing of their mates.

Money, having become paramount in India, as indeed it has throughout the world, the outcome is that it is comparatively easy to get your boy married and correspondingly difficult to get your girl married. As in most other countries, the birthrate, or survival rate of female children in India exceeds that of males, so the situation grows more difficult as the years pass for those unfortunate people who consider themselves to be cursed with a family of daughters.

In the overall picture, as people do not want to be childless for the reason I have already mentioned, the work of the government and of family planning organisations is extremely difficult. The significance of the threatened 'population explosion' is entirely lost on the average Indian ryot and poor person.

Poverty today is so great, and the cost of living so high, that a married couple can never think of having any form of hobby or recreation, however simple. Nor can they furnish their houses or buy any of the good things of life, not to mention food. This hand-to-mouth existence creates a deadly routine. Both husband and wile can afford to partake only of a very frugal *nasta* (breakfast), consisting of a small rice cake and a sip of coffee. Then both go out to work. The midday meal is equally frugal, and when they return in the evening the wife has to cook dinner, which again is frugal enough and consists of only a little curry and rice. After that, the couple retire for the night. They do not read, as they are illiterate. Even if they could read, they are too poor to afford the electricity or the kerosene required to illuminate their tiny rooms, many of which are hardly better than hovels.

What is there, anyway, for them to lie and discuss? The scarcity of food? The rising cost of living? Life's problems, and more problems and yet more? The only recreation that remains to these poor people is sex. It costs nothing. Further it does bring with it a measure of forgetfulness, of satisfaction, and a certain joy. Thirdly, when both are bullied at work by grasping employers, who drive them all day for what they can get out of them in the form of labour all day in return for a miserable pay, the realm of sex is something in which the man, and more rarely the woman, can at least dare to boost their frustrated egos. They can really let themselves go without fear.

Now, into the midst of this picture, admittedly dismal, comes a

group of people who preach that even this one remaining pleasure should be eschewed. They are the members of the Family Planning Centre, introduced by the government at the behest of the UNO (who are all foreigners anyway), and they say that a married couple should have no children, or at most two children, and not more. These people say that the world is too full of children, and soon will be too full of men and women, and there will not be enough food to go around. As if there was enough food even now! The way to avoid all this, say the Family Planning people, is for each man and woman to undergo an operation. Alternatively, the woman may wear a loop, or swallow a pill now and then, or use some other sort of device.

So the villagers ask themselves: what in the world is life coming to? Our fathers, our grandfathers, our great-grandfathers, all enjoyed sex! We enjoy sex! Now these people tell us these things. They are trying to take away from us the only pleasure that remains to us. We have nothing else to enjoy but the act of sex. Must we give that up, too? Because one day some years hence, the world will be too full of men and women and there will be no food to eat! Where will we be then? We are starving now anyway, and we may not live another five years. Maybe not even another one. Certainly not for twenty or thirty years? So leave us in peace to enjoy the one and only pleasure left. Mind your own business and leave us to mind ours. Why, only the other day when we went to the coffee shop for a sip, we heard all the people there laughing heartily. 'What is so funny?' Some of us asked, 'Let's share the joke.'

It was sometime before anyone could stop even to speak. At last one said, 'Remember the Family Planning doctor who used to lecture to us daily? And remember the nurse who fitted our women with loops, and distributed pills among them? Well, he has made her pregnant and now she is on maternity leave.'

'Ho! Ho! Ho! Ha! Ha! Ha! Her own loop must have fallen off!'

On the other hand, my friend 'Samiar' (a term of religious respect), who lives on a little hillock not far from my land near Pennagram, in Salem district, plies a more popular and a far more lucrative trade.

Just over five feet tall, little Samiar (who is getting on in years now) enhances his stature by wearing several coils of very dirty black false hair upon his head. He has brilliant, piercing black eyes and wears huge earrings. On ceremonial occasions he decorates his forehead with white and red caste marks. For the forty years or more that I have known him, Samiar's reputation as a medicine man who can make barren women bear children has not ceased to soar. Hundreds of women have been brought to him, and as many have come of their own accord.

Samiar charges a very low professional fee for this service; just ten

rupees for a poor woman and a fifty for a very rich one. The other condition is that the woman must be left alone with him in his hut during the hours of daylight. (To make such a condition extend into the hours of darkness would be scandalous, would it not? But surely nothing could possibly happen while the sun was shining, and after all, he is a 'Samiar', is he not?) Not so strangely, about half of the women become pregnant, but what is more strange is that most of those who do become pregnant have husbands who are sickly or otherwise wanting.

As I have hinted, I know Samiar extremely well. What very few others know is that he is a powerful hypnotist; also a rascal of the first degree, although an extremely jolly and likeable rascal. What is strangest of all is that many of these children, as they grew older, become rascals too, but jolly and likeable ones, and all of them have brilliant piercing, black eyes.

I have wandered in this country all my life, in its jungles, in its villages. I have mixed with hundreds of its poorest folk and talked to them. What I have written is only what they have told me in their own words. Of course, I understand the threat of 'population explosion'. I know, and can and do appreciate what the Family Planning Units are trying to do. But I greatly fear it will not work. The poor Indian, like everybody else, is human even if he is poor. He wants something concrete for himself, here and now, and is scarcely interested in what happens in the future, even only twenty or thirty years hence. He does not expect to live that long himself. And he could not care less what happens to those alive at that time.

Since there is no alternative recreation for him, since the conditions of living will continue to be as hard and difficult, and will grow harder and more difficult from day to day, he (and she) are not going to give up or even curtail in any way the one and only recreation they have left to them—the pastime of 'sex'.

India is being flooded by young people of all nationalities who come to the country in the thousands every month. Except for Russians, we meet folk from the Americas and from western Europe, even from Japan, wandering about the streets of our cities and towns. Some are 'hippies' but the majority are not, although it will be difficult for you to find any in normal western dress. On the contrary, some adopt the saffron gown and heavy head necklaces of the Yogi, the short loincloth and bare body of the Indian labourer, the loose pants with outside shirt of the northern Indian, with hairstyles varying from long hair and heavy beard through all the intermediary stages to no hair at all on either head or face. Mostly they are to be seen with hair flowing wildly in the breeze and in other cases wound around the head in elaborate hairstyles. The women of these groups appear

equally odd: a few wear sarees draped around themselves rather clumsily and not in the graceful manner of an Indian woman, while others wear the 'kameez' and 'calva' (the shirt and tight trousers) of the northern Indian ladies. Some come in ultra-mini skirts, while a number are at the opposite extreme, wearing dresses of ankle-length that defy definition.

Curiosity has urged me to talk to a number of these visitors in an effort to understand them, and this much I have gleaned, that almost everyone has confessed that he or she has found no place in the world like India. Some of them have travelled widely, and all of them hope to spend the rest of their lives in India. I have then inquired what it is they have found so attractive, but to this question I found a great variety of answers. Some say this country is very peaceful, the people very nice, the climate excellently warm, the sunshine superb, food and living very cheap. Others say they have a great urge for matters spiritual which they cannot satisfy in their own country, where the rush and bustle is too great. All are agreed on one thing. Time counts for nothing in India; there is no hurry about anything and there is always a tomorrow.

A large number of these people have attached themselves to *ashrams* or to individual Yogis in different parts of this peninsula. One of the main centres is at Pondicherry where men and women of different races have joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram with hopes of settling down in the interracial township of Auroville, already planned and now under construction. This township promises to be Utopian in character, where people of all nations, colours and religions may live together in peace and harmony—the only township of its kind in Asia. Many others have joined the following of the reincarnated Sai Baba at Whitefield. They are happy in their search for peace of soul, peace of mind and peace of living.

But all of these visitors are apt to forget a very important factor; actually, the most important factor of the lot. They have money sent out to them from their home countries, and if it were not for these remittances they would not be able to live in India at all, whether in an *ashram* or elsewhere, for as visitors and foreigners they are not allowed to take up work and be paid for it. It would be well for them to bear this fact in mind always, and not to speak so bitterly against their own lands as some of them do. For I repeat, it is their own country that gives them the money on which they find they can live so happily in India. Should these remittances for any reason cease, these visitors would have to go back to their countries and the 'rat-race' from which they have fled. And they will have to go back in a terribly great hurry, for each day they delay would make them that much more hungry.

But we have another type of foreign visitor, one who appears to want to break all the laws of the host country and escape the consequences by virtue of the fact that he is a citizen of another land. I am certain these people would never think of behaving in their own lands as some of them do in India. No doubt the comparatively easy living, the lack of the time factor, the probability that they will get away with it nine times out of ten, if not ninety-nine times out of a hundred, tempts them to act in this way, not realising (or caring) that their action boomerangs upon themselves, and upon their own countrymen wanting to visit India, and lastly on unfortunate people like myself who have chosen to remain in India and make it our home. Because of such wayward behaviour, we are classed with them as undesirable, as pestilential white folk who have no business to remain in India, who should go back without further delay to wherever we, or our ancestors, come from. In the stress of situations created by thoughtless visitors, it is only natural for Indians to forget that some of us settlers whose families have been in this land for generations by virtue of our living and experience are as much Indian, if not more than they are themselves. We have helped to build India into what it is.

But let me return to matters more strictly Indian, from which I appear to have strayed. Rarely will an Indian of the working classes, man or woman, know his or her own age or date of birth. Little attention is paid to this event, although the anniversary of a death is always remembered. This is because a whole set of ceremonies has to be performed for the dead person, year after year on the anniversary of a death. No importance, however, rests on a birthday. This is not true, however, of the upper classes. Not only is the day of birth recorded but the exact time to the very minute. The reason is that each individual man and woman of the middle classes or above is required to have his or her horoscope cast. It is incumbent upon the parents to do this for their children, and astrologers, who earn a very comfortable living in India casting horoscopes, require to know exact details of time and place of birth to be able to cast the horoscope correctly.

The one thing that may be regarded as the curse of our country, and which the government from the time of Independence has tried, and is still trying hard to stamp out, albeit with little success, is the caste system. This system concerns only Hindus and not the other communities inhabiting this vast land. In simple words it means that every living Hindu, man, woman or child, must belong to one or other of the numerous castes that go to form the Hindu community. They belong to a caste, whichever it may be, by virtue of being born into it through parents of that same caste.

No person can change his or her caste under any circumstances. He can never promote himself to a higher caste whatever his merits or achievements. He is of that caste because his parents belonged to it and his grand parents before them, and his great-grandparents before that, and so on. His caste is as unalterable as the laws of the universe. Some of these caste classifications are governed by the trade the individual follows. It goes without saying that his father, grandfather and so on, followed the same trade before him.

For example, scavengers or sweepers, as they are called, are at the lowest rung of the caste ladder. Cobblers, or 'clucklers' as these are termed, are a slight step higher, and so on till we come to the warrior caste and the highest of all, the priests or Brahmins.

To give you an idea of how the caste system operates, let me show you a true-to-life example. About fourteen miles south of my home-town of Bangalore is a wild and hilly area known as Bannerghatta, where I own a farmstead consisting of a furnished house, a stone-lined well, and five acres of land, which I purchased for less than Rs. 10,000 (about £556). Half a mile from this farmstead are two hamlets. The name of one is Sampigehalli, and the name of the other is Byrappanahalli. Each consists of less than 200 homes. About two-thirds of these buildings are brick-and-mud structures, and the remaining one-third are wattle-and-thatch huts. The population of each settlement is well within 1,000 souls. Nevertheless in each of these hamlets there are no less than seven castes. Among these, the Brahmins and Lingayats are the highest in status; then come the Vakalgiries, working down to Kurubas, Maloles, Waddars and Madigols.

The government has built wells in both places for the use of all the inhabitants. But do you think that anyone or everyone is allowed to draw water? Not a bit of it. The lower castes are strictly debarred. Incidentally, I myself am debarred from drawing water although I am not a Hindu and do not belong to any caste. The reason is that I eat beef. As a beefeater, I am considered as belonging to the lowest category of human being, lower even than a Madigol, if that were possible. Is not the cow a sacred animal? And I dare to eat it.

Then men, of course, never draw water. In a home such a task is considered to be beneath the status of a husband as master of the household. Only the women go to the village well. Yet, should a woman of one of the lower castes require water, she may go to the well with her pitcher, but that is all she can do. She must wait till a woman of a higher caste comes along; then she may ask this woman to be kind enough to draw a pot of water for her use. If the woman obliges, well and good. Should the woman be in too great a hurry and unable to spare the time, the low-caste woman must wait till some

high-caste housewife, who can spare the time and is kind enough to oblige, draws the water for her.

One of the servants at my farmstead is named Ramiah. He is an old man and a Madigol. He lives with his son and daughter-in-law and two grandchildren in a wattle-and-thatch hut in Byrappanahalli hamlet. One night we had a great storm, with high winds and torrential rain. Ramiah's hut fell down about midnight. Do you think the family could shelter in one of their neighbour's huts or house? No! They were Madigols, that is of the lowest caste! So Ramiah, his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren sat in the pouring rain all night amidst the remains of their fallen hut and continued to sit there till noon the following day, by which time the sun had partly dried both them and the thatch scattered upon the ground. Then they got together to rebuild what they could of their hut before nightfall. There was no alternative if they were to avoid sitting in the open for another night.

The hamlets of Sampigehalli and Byrappanahalli are still there and these customs continue to this day. The government has tried hard to eradicate them. But the customs are centuries old and, as everyone knows, old habits die hard, particularly does the caste habit, because everyone of a higher caste has such a glorious opportunity to exploit all the castes below him.

The government has also tried to help the tillers of the soil. It has given many of them a couple of acres of land per head, a plough and two head of cattle, along with a loan to build a hut for themselves. As often as not the recipients of these gifts sell the plough and the oxen within a month of receiving them, and try to sell or mortgage the land as well. That is going rather far, however, and nobody has sufficient nerve to conclude this last transaction by buying the land.

Ryots have been invited to take generous loans from banks on security of the title-deeds of their lands. The money is intended to develop the land for agricultural purposes by digging wells, fertilising fields and so on. The loans carry very low interest, are for ten years, and may be repaid in easy instalments. But the ten years come and go, and no instalments, easy or otherwise, are paid, nor interest. The lands are not fertilised or developed, nor are wells dug. The ryot has spent the money on his daughter's dowry and wedding or on himself, in having a good time. The lockers of the banks are filled with people's title-deeds and the banks are wondering what they are going to do with them.

Major organised crime is rare in India. Murders are frequent, but they are generally motivated by infidelity, jealousy or disputes over land. Suicides are common and people kill themselves for every conceivable reason. The folk are emotional and temperamental, and

suicide follows in the wake of a normally simple everyday problem which might have been easily solved.

Far down in the crime scale are pocket-picking, petty cheating and pilfering. To the last two groups there is no limit; it is taken for granted that your neighbour will cheat you should he get half a chance to do so and if you have not been clever enough to cheat him first.

By and large, the rich classes are very rich and the poor very poor. Between these two extremes is a vast middle class of people forming perhaps a third of the population. The very poor make up the remaining two-thirds, the rich people being but a tiny fraction of the whole population. These rich people—landlords, business tycoons, cinema stars and so forth—have little to do with the very poor and as a rule are not in the least considerate to them. The poor, comprising the bulk of the population, have been poor all their lives and for generations before, having descended from a long line of ancestors who have always been poor. Prior to independence in 1947, for hundreds of years they had been ruled and oppressed by foreigners as well as their own kith and kin in the form of maharajahs, chieftain, princes, zamindars, landlords and money-lenders. They think in terms of having had no past, a present that is extremely bad, and a future that is without hope.

With all this background of poverty, misery and general hopelessness, we should not be too hard on those petty faults and weaknesses which are but the natural outcome of generations of exploitation and overpowering sense of inferiority. It is to be hoped that the time will come when the races of India realise at last that they are an independent people and not just talk about it.

India is a beautiful land, inhabited by a nice, friendly people, more appreciated by foreigners than by themselves. The majority of Indians think in narrow terms of caste, religion and community rather than nationality. The rulers are doing what they can to correct them and create a sense of national unity, but they have an uphill task, with many ancient customs and prejudices to overcome—the chief of which is the caste system—and a host of self-interested people to beat. Old habits die hard, and in this instance it is particularly difficult to kill the old caste bogey for the very cogent reason that millions of persons classed as of high caste, live and benefit by it, as their ancestors did before them for untold generations. It is only natural that they are disinclined to relinquish a way of living that has been and still is of daily gain to themselves in every sphere—in their employment, their official, social and financial and domestic status—merely in order to satisfy an ideal of improving the country, when they know quite well they will not be nearly so well off should the caste system disappear.

Four

Some Indian Game Sanctuaries

I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF VISITING FIVE OF THE GAME SANCTUARIES of northern India. These five, and a number of others, have been created by the government in a last minute attempt to save some of the noblest animals of the subcontinent from extinction. Among these creatures are the Asian lion that is found only in the Gir forest of Gujarat state, the one-horned rhinoceros that lives in the northeastern extremity of the country in the state of Assam and in Nepal, the Indian wild buffalo found roughly in the same localities as the one-horned rhino, and the swamp deer, sometimes called the *barasingha* (meaning 'twelve-horned deer'), because of the twelve tines that adorn this magnificent animal, six upon either antler.

I began a tour of five sanctuaries in the company of two American friends and a Canadian, and as I maintained a day-to-day record of all that happened, I had better present the facts as they occurred. As far as I was concerned, the journey started when I left the airport of Bangalore for Bombay on the morning of March 3, 1970. It was a smooth fast flight, with nothing much of interest to see. We flew over Belgaum and soon saw smoke rising from several forest fires that were raging on the ghats between Poona and Bombay.

In exactly one and a half hours we touched down at the Santa Cruz airport at Bombay, whence I went by taxi to the Nataraj Hotel, which was the arranged rendezvous with the other members of the party, whose plane, however, arrived only after a fifteen-hour delay.

Eventually we started one morning for the small airport of Keshod in Gujarat state, from which point air-passengers are conveyed to the heart of the Gir forest, where we had booked rooms in the spacious forest lodge, where travellers are generally accommodated. The plane —a Dakota magnificently dolled up and in excellent flying condition— carried us across the small strip of the Arabian Sea which separates the city of Bombay from the peninsula of Saurashtra, which forms the western portion of Gujarat state. We flew over several steamers and noticed shoals of dolphins leaping from the waves.

The airport of Keshod is a few miles inland. There we were met by the van that was to convey us to the settlement of Sasan Gir, fifty-five miles distant, in the heart of the forest of the lions. En route we passed the port of Veraval with its ancient Somnath temple. There is a legend here that when the Mohammedan invader, Mohammed of Ghazni, planned to destroy this edifice in 1026, two thousand Brahmins poured holy water, brought all the way from the Ganges river, upon the idols, and strewed flowers over them night and day, to win the grace of the Gods and avert disaster. Mohammed of Ghazni never destroyed the temple.

The road was dry and dusty and the forest, when we reached it, was equally dry, rather open, sprinkled with *babul* trees and interspersed with dwarf teak and not too many thorns. Except for the teak, the scenery was reminiscent of Africa.

The 'Guest House', which is the grandiloquent name given to the forest lodge, was comfortably furnished and the *khansamma* (cook-butler-tableboy) laid out a welcoming meal. We found the officials of the Forestry department most obliging and cooperative.

What is popularly called the 'lion show' had been arranged for five o'clock that evening. A live buffalo-bait had been tied up about eight miles away and the pride of lions that had been located in the vicinity actually 'called' to the spot by the junior forest officials, corresponding in rank to the forest guards of southern India, but known in Gir as *shikarees* or *chowkidars*. Many of them are quite old, and have been in the employment of the Forestry department when the Gir forest belonged to Junagadh state and ruled by a Muslim prince. This prince flew to Pakistan when India annexed his territories, and that was how the Gir forest became part of the province of Saurashtra in the Indian state of Gujarat. The *shikarees* and *chowkidars* were transferred to service in the government of Gujarat, but many of them still proudly display the letters J. F. (for Junagadh Forests) in polished brass on their tunics.

Incidentally, no visitor is allowed to watch the actual killing of the buffalo-bait by lions. The authorities consider that this might encourage the taking of life. But there is no objection to watching the

lions feeding once that bait has been killed by them. The bait costs the visitor Rs. 150, and there is also a fee for using still or cine cameras.

It is interesting to watch the *shikarees* and *chowkidars* actually calling the wild lions. There are generally two of these men present, and they make a 'Khik! Khik! Khik!' sound with their mouths, followed by a 'Kroo! Kroo! Kroo!' noise with their lips. The wild lions appear to respond to these calls, if they do not recognize the persons who are making them and actually approach quite close to the caller.

To be on the safe side, the guards are armed with single-barrelled guns of .12 bore, loaded with buckshot. I examined the weapons carried by the men who had called the lions and found them to be as ancient as the men themselves assuredly hailing from the days of the old Junagadh forests. I then questioned the men as to why they carried these weapons, and the older of the two replied that sometimes, although very rarely, a young lion in his prime would resent the presence of onlookers in numbers, armed with cameras big and small, who keep moving around while he and the other members of the pride are eating. This animal then becomes aggressive, begins to growl and excites the rest of the pride. Then anything might happen.

'I have been dealing with lions since I was a boy, *sahib,*' he confided in Hindustani, 'and my father before me, and his father, and his father before that. Always watch the tail, *sahib*, then the eyes. And listen to any noise the animal might make. When the tail begins to twitch and rise above his back, when those large green eyes lose their roundness and start to half-close, when the whining sound he is making—or perhaps he is making no sound at all, or maybe he is just grunting—changes to a rumbling growl, he is about to charge you. Run for your life then, if you think you can. Actually it will be useless, for you won't run very far. Should none of these things happen, you are safe, although it might only be for the moment. Never can you tell when these *shaitan log* (devil people) suddenly become angry. You should always watch, watch, watch. The tail *sahib*, and those big green eyes!'

Apparently the purpose of the ancient gun and its load of buckshot was to fire in the air if necessity arose, rather than at the offending animal should it begin to evince signs of rising excitement. My informer said that the noise of the shot invariably had the effect of calming it down. Personally, I think the main purpose of the old guns was to boost the courage of those who carried them.

There was a pride of six lions on the kill when we arrived shortly after five o'clock. It consisted of two full-grown lionesses and four half-grown cubs, two cubs belonging apparently to each lioness. Unlike tigers and most other animals, all the lions seemed to be on friendly terms with each other and there were no signs of quarrelling.

As we grew bolder, we went closer and closer, till we were within thirty feet of the feasting animals. My friends, who were equipped with cameras, were taking photographs as fast as they were able. At one stage one of the lionesses, possibly disgusted at our close presence, seized the kill by a hind leg and pulled so hard at it as to break the tethering rope. She started to drag the dead buffalo away.

Then an amazing thing happened. The two *chowkidars* ran forward, caught hold of the dead animal by a foreleg, and started to pull in the opposite direction. It was an incredible spectacle. A tug of war between two human beings and a wild lioness, with five other lions looking on and a crowd of human spectators. I would never have believed it had anyone told me. The foresters were no match for the lioness, who started dragging them along with the kill. Then, amazingly, they let go of the leg they were pulling and ran forward towards the lioness, shouting in unison at the pitch of their lungs. The lioness released her hold, leaped backwards, and stood erect to look at the two men wistfully.

The other five lions were watching the scene with interest. We continued to regard it with amazement. Hastily, and not without considerable effort, the two men dragged the bait back to the tree to which it had been secured, and re-tethered it. I then lost my regard for the ferocity of the lions of Gir. As if nothing whatsoever had happened, all the lions returned to their meal, and in less than an hour there was not much left of the buffalo but bones.

The cubs, now replete with meat, began to take an interest in us. Their mothers, also full, rolled on to their sides and went to sleep. The sun was low in the western horizon.

Seeing themselves free of parental interference for once, two of the youngsters bounded playfully towards us, making guttural, mewing noises. Clearly they were purring as lion cubs usually do.

'Get back, *sahib*! Get back!' cautioned the elder *chowkidar* in a low voice, at the same time motioning urgently with his hand for us to retreat. Rather surprised at his unexpected concern at the approach of the cubs we nevertheless obeyed.

'If the mother wakes up and sees them near you,' he said by way of explanation, 'she will think you are going to harm them. Then all hell will break loose. You will come to know what the *shaitan log* are really like.'

Very soon the two lionesses awoke and returned to the remains of the kill which, as I have said, now consisted mainly of bones. One of the spectators, a professional photographer from Austria, got the *chowkidars* to drive the lionesses back for a moment while he hung a microphone from a branch of the tree beneath which the bones lay. Then he photographed the lionesses teasing the bones while he tape

recorded the sounds.

Just about this time one of the lionesses had a small fracas with a cub that was worrying her. The Austrian recorded this too. Then he played the tape back. It was amusing to observe the expressions on the lion's faces when they heard their own growl and snarls.

Suddenly the pride stopped feeding. With one accord all heads, including those of the cubs, were turned away towards a *nullah* a few yards distant. We could see nothing. We heard nothing. The next moment, silently, from between the stems of teak and *babul*, a magnificent lion in his prime stepped forth, his mane was only slightly less heavy than that of his African cousin. Even at this distance and in the fading light, we could see the tufts of hair protruding from the elbows of his forelegs.

Our *chowkidars* became perturbed. They backed away from the pride and motioned to us to follow. We did so, retreating the fifty yards to where the van awaited us. We got inside.

'It is the bad lion, *sahib,*' said the older forester. 'When he turns up, the lion show must come to an end at once. For he brooks no spectators and is no respector of cars or persons. See even the other lions fear him.'

We turned to see the pride of six scatter in all directions. There came a thundering growl as the newcomer walked up to the bones, sniffed at them, and raised his head to regard us balefully.

The light was bad, but the photographers in the party wanted to stay to photograph the lion. The two *chowkidars*, however, were obdurate. To remain would be to court trouble, if not tragedy. They urged the driver to start the vehicle and drive away. When we complained the older man replied, '*Sahib*, we are responsible for the safety of all of you. That animal is a *shaitan* personified. If he had made up his mind to charge, these ancient weapons we carry would not stop him. Allah himself knows whether the cartridges would go off, for they are very old. We give him a wide berth when he appears. So also do the other lions, as you can see for yourself.'

It was dusk when we left the bad lion in undisputed control of the situation and began the return journey. We passed a few spotted deer, some late peafowl and a four-horned antelope a mile or so further and then, just as it was getting too dark to see, we heard a lion roaring a few paces from the track.

The elder *chowkidar* motioned to the driver of the van to stop, then banged the metal door with his hand while making the 'Khik-Khik!' sound with his mouth and the 'Kroo-Kroo!' noise with his lips. Within a few minutes a half-grown lion stepped out of the gloom, halted and gazed at the van expectantly. Clearly, he was hoping for something to eat in the way of live bait. We watched him for some minutes, then

stepped out of the vehicle, whereupon the lion melted away into the shadows.

More excitement awaited us upon our return to the Guest House. Not content with the lion show, the enterprising Range Officer in charge had laid on a panther show as well. After dinner we were invited to attend this exhibition by following a pathway which led from the bungalow through scrub-jungle to a spot scarcely 300 yards away. A goat had been tied up to a post earlier in the evening and killed by a panther which was, apparently, a regular visitor to the spot, as he got an easy meal almost every second day in order to allow visitors to watch him eat. As with the buffalo-bait and the lions, spectators were not permitted to see the actual killing but there was apparently no harm in watching the panther eat once it had killed the goat. Incidentally, that goat cost us about Rs. 60.

All was ready. The panther had killed the goat—a black one—earlier, and then been driven off, being held at bay by a *chowkidar* with a big stick, squatting beside the dead goat. As darkness had fallen already, the scene was faintly illumined by concealed floodlights. The *path* we followed led into a big, circular iron-barred cage similar to what one sees at a circus but with this difference. At the circus the animals are in the cage and the spectators outside. Here, we were in the cage and the panther, outside.

Once we had assembled, the *chowkidar* with the big stick who had been keeping the panther off the kill, left his post, bringing his stick with him, and entered the iron cage with us. Then he secured the door behind him.

The panther had been watching and waiting for this moment. Obviously he was well practised in the procedure and may often have wondered to himself what it was all about. Perhaps he was wiser and wondered how stupid human beings were to go to all this trouble just to watch him eat.

Up he trotted within a few moments and fell with gusto upon the goat. The floodlights were gradually increased in intensity until, in about ten minutes, the scene was brightly lit. The panther became aware of this and must have felt uncomfortable, for he made one or two attempts to drag the goat away. But the tethering rope held fast, and the panther eventually resigned himself to tucking-in to meal under brilliant floodlight.

What might have been a rather unexciting exhibition was fortunately ended by the unexpected arrival of a hyaena. Perhaps this animal thought that he should also be given an opportunity to show himself. He sneaked up from behind, but the panther discovered him. With a snarl the panther left the kill to chase the hyaena away. The hyaena bolted, with the panther behind him, and the lights were

dimmed.

Soon the panther returned, and a little later the hyaena too. Another loud snarl and another chase. Back came the panther followed by the hyaena who, growing bolder, showed himself. This time there was much snarling and growling on the part of the panther, and shrieking by the hyaena, but they never came to actual grips. Clearly the panther was not going to have everything his own way.

In the meantime the *chowkidar*, a young man this time, who had been through it all many times before and was manifestly bored, remembered that he had a young wife at home and felt that she would be in need of him. He coughed vigorously and clapped his hands. At the same time the floodlights were put out.

The panther show had come to its end. In the darkness we could scarcely find the exit from the iron cage, but eventually we got back to the luxurious forest lodge and the foam-rubber mattresses and pillows on its beds.

At midnight I went out on the verandah. My companions were sound asleep. In the distance a lion roared. From the low hills on the opposite side came a chorus of roars in answer: 'Aaauuungh! Aaauuungh! Aauungh! Aauungh! Aungh! Aungh! Aungh! Aung! Aung!' The bewitching sounds died away into silence. I wondered if the 'bad' lion was calling to the frightened pride.

Before six o'clock the following morning we were on our way in the van to a jungle lake half-a-dozen miles away and reached it in time to glimpse a lovely sunrise over the jungle-clad hills to the east. The morning was pleasantly chilly in spite of the fact that we were in midsummer and in one of the arid areas of India.

A spotted stag brayed his challenge by the lakeside and in a few moments we saw him break cover and approach the water to drink, a dark silhouette against the golden *path* laid by the rays of the risen sun across the limpid water. A bevy of peafowl, quite twenty birds in all, followed one another to within a hundred yards of where the spotted stag was still drinking, and at that moment a magical sound rent the air. A lion roared in a low valley beyond the roadside and another answered from a short distance further off.

A sambar-stag, hearing those roars, belled his alarm from a distant hill-top. I was excited, perhaps even more than my three friends from overseas. For I am familiar with the habits of tigers which are quite different from those of lions, and the calls of the lions enthralled me. I tore down the hill in the direction of the sounds and my friends followed closely behind.

Soon we arrived at a sandy stream. Impressed freshly upon the soft earth of the further bank were huge pug-marks. And they had not been made by a tiger—for there are no tigers in the Gir forest. They

were the pug-marks of a lion.

We hastened onwards and were in time to catch a glimpse of the animal leap into the undergrowth and vanish. Clearly it had known that we were strangers and not the *chowkidars* to whom it was undoubtedly accustomed. We could not see much of his mane in the few moments the lion gave us. It was probably a young animal; certainly not the 'bad' lion, which was just as well.

The sun had risen by the time we got back to the car. The road circumvented a hillside and we were able to look down upon a vast sheet of water. Floating upon it in several places were what appeared to be logs of wood, but which I recognised as crocodiles. Then we began the return journey, passing more spotted deer and peafowl on the way. Also a small sounder of wild pigs.

The jungle-track passed several hamlets occupied by Maldharis, the name given to a pastoral sect of people who live in this area and bring their cattle into the Gir forest for grazing. They are a colourful race. The men wear loosely-gathered jackets and voluminous trousers, a turban or headband of coloured cloth, a metal necklace with large ornaments, sometimes bangles of bone, and inevitably carry wooden staves. The women dress rather like the Indian gypsies, with ample brightly-hued sarees, tight-fitting jackets that reveal wonderful figures no Western woman could hope to approach, necklaces, bangles, ear-rings of silver, beads and imitation ivory. They are most handsome. The children look like miniatures of their elders but are even more brightly clothed.

In days past there was an abundance of water and grass in the Gir jungle. Animals were plentiful too. The lions had their natural prey and were not much interested in eating the livestock owned by the Maldharis, a species of buffalo, large and with curved, looping horns, which the peasants were mostly able to protect successfully.

The Maldharis were poor but happy in the forest with their buffaloes, whose milk and milk products they sold to the local *sahukars* or moneylenders to whom they were in debt. But with the passing of the old Junagadh state came unexpected problems. More and more cattle from all over Saurashtra and Kutch were driven into the forest, their numbers estimated at about 48,000 a year, in addition to the 21,000 stock owned by the resident Maldharis, who inhabit 129 *nesses*, or hamlets, corresponding to the cattle *pattis* in the jungles of southern India. The Gir forest then became a vast cattle camp, which created an acute shortage of water and grazing, for which the Maldhari now has to travel a long distance. With the continuous increase in cattle came cattle diseases that spread to the wild fauna. The shortage of grazing also cut the wild fauna down in numbers, and so did the increase in promiscuous poaching.

All these changes affected the lions; they began to kill the cattle and buffaloes of the Maldharis in greater numbers. The Maldharis became poorer with the rising cost of living; they could not afford to purchase cottonseed and groundnut cake to feed their herds. Municipal taxes made the sale of their milk products difficult and they were denied the benefits extended by welfare schemes in the towns for the sale of butter and ghee for the reason that they were not urban folk.

In desperation the Maldharis, who were generally not able to procure firearms, began to poison the lions that killed their stock by poisoning the flesh of the cattle that had been killed. When the lions returned for a second meal, they ate the poison and died in agony.

This is the same sort of thing that has led to the almost complete extinction of tiger, panthers and even hyaenas in southern India. But the position is even worse in the Gir; for whereas tigers and panthers almost always hunt alone and are therefore poisoned one at a time, the Gir lions, like their African cousins, hunt and feed in prides and are thus poisoned in numbers. We were told that nine lions had been poisoned in this manner very recently. This was shocking news, considering the fact that the lions of Gir are the only representatives of their species in the whole of Asia.

The Gir itself has also been intruded upon by cultivation around its perimeter, so that the area now comprising this forest is but 1,300 square kilometers or 576 square miles in extent. A census of the lions remaining in this jungle, conducted in 1955 by measuring and counting footprints, indicated about 247 animals. The next census in 1968 showed only 177 lions, a decrease of about forty per cent. The fate of the Gir lion is, indeed, hanging by a thread.

A century ago, the forests of Gir covered three times the present area. Recent statistics reveal that sixty-three per cent of the land surrounding the Sanctuary is under cultivation. With the felling of the forest and advent of more and more cattle, together with the presence of poachers and the poisoning of kills, the noble lion of Gir seems doomed to extinction.

The Sanctuary is now estimated to support a wildlife population of less than twenty-five per cent of its original strength, compelling the lions to rely almost solely on the buffaloes of the Maldharis for food. Their ability to get enough to eat is severely taxed. Although this animal is by nature a nocturnal hunter, existing conditions compel it to hunt by day because the Maldharis corral their stock at sundown.

The Maldhari settlements past which we drove in the van that morning proved to be small mud huts, thatched with sticks and leaves. Allowing a vacant space for the cattle, the whole area of each *ness* is enclosed by a strong, tall thorn fence, very reminiscent of the thorn

bomas of African herdsmen, or in some instance by rock-and-mud walls. Indeed, the whole scenery in the forest is much like that of the thorny scrub-jungles of Africa except for the occasional stunted teak tree growing in between.

Should a lion succeed in jumping one of these fences or walls and killing a buffalo, his effort is vain, since he cannot get his kill over the obstruction to freedom. Should a lion succeed in killing one of the herd in the jungle, he generally loses most of the meat when the Maldhari herdsmen combine to drive him away to salvage the hide.

Incidentally, this also happens in southern India when the herdsmen drive a tiger or panther off the cow it has just killed. Occasionally the feline resents this intrusion and attacks a herdsman, mauling him, even occasionally killing him. That, in turn, has often led to the tiger or panther becoming a man-eater. I was told that the same thing has happened in Gir, although infrequently. Now and then a lion has taken to killing men and eating them; it has then had to be shot.

It is estimated that of the domestic stock killed within the Sanctuary fifty per cent are taken by lions and outside the Sanctuary, up to eighty per cent. Panthers account for the remaining kills. As I have said before, there are no tigers in the area.

Because he is mostly deprived of his victim, either as soon as he kills or when he returns to the carcass to find the hide removed by the owners, the lion is of necessity compelled to kill more often than would be the case if he were allowed to gorge his fill. Statistics show that twenty-three per cent of the kills are not eaten at all, while the lions are barely able to consume ten kilograms of meat from a further twenty per cent of kills.

This cycle of unfortunate circumstances has brought the lions of Gir forest into conflict with the Maldharis who occupy the 129 *nesses* they have established all over the Sanctuary, as well as the owners of thousands of visiting cattle. Enraged herdsmen do not hesitate to shoot or poison such lions as they are able to if they will not be detected.

The government pays compensation to the owner whose animal has been killed by a lion outside the Sanctuary, but not when it has been killed within. This is not good enough. The Sanctuary, which was primarily created for the protection of these Asiatic lions, is not being allowed to function as it should and fulfil the purpose for which it was instituted.

Of the natural wild fauna three-quarters have disappeared. Most of the fertile valleys in the Sanctuary have been cultivated and a continuous strip of cultivation has already cut the Sanctuary almost in two. The felling of trees—mainly teak—continues, while the hordes of

domestic livestock prevent saplings from replacing them. Nearly two million kilograms of grass fodder are removed from the Sanctuary every year. The Sanctuary has been reduced to an impoverished, artificial and heavily-exploited zone. The presence of the few remaining Asiatic lions alone has aroused worldwide interest, but only the government of India can save the situation at this last-minute stage.

I am glad to be able to record that the Central government has risen to the occasion and has entrusted the state government of Gujarat with a scheme called The Gir Lion Sanctuary Project, which started in January 1972. The Governor of Gujarat, Shri Shriman Narayan, envisaged a twofold target, the first object of which was to protect the lions of Gir in particular, as well as other wildlife, from poaching, poisoning and dangerous diseases. The second object is the socioeconomic improvement of the Maldharis' condition.

Many meetings were held and resolutions passed, resulting in formal orders being issued by the government of Gujarat to: (1) Close the Sanctuary permanently to grazing by migrant cattle. (2) Enclose the whole area with an effective physical barrier. (3) Allot land outside the Sanctuary to the Maldharis at present inhabiting 129 *nesses* inside it, and to shift them, with their families and livestock, out of the Sanctuary in a phased programme. It remains to be seen how far these aims are carried out. One fact is certain. Should the programme fail to be executed, the Gir lion is doomed to extinction within the next decade. Any number of meetings and resolutions, stacks of orders that exist on paper, speeches by the highest officials, drawings, plans and schemes supported by statistical data will not save the lion. What is required is action, and that quickly.

It is discouraging to learn that, after the passage of a whole year, the Maldharis were still where they have always been, in their *nesses* within the Sanctuary.

After breakfast, at about ten o'clock, we left the forest lodge in the van to motor the dusty roads to the capital of the old Muslim ruler, a town named Junagadh, which is filled with ancient Muslim tombs and mosques. A quick lunch at the Circuit House and we were away again, this time bound for the royal palace of Wankaner, where we were to spend a night and day as guests of His Highness the Maharajah and the Prince Yuvaraj of Wankaner. The distance from Sassan Gir to the palace is 105 miles by road.

Petrol trouble delayed us, but we were more or less on schedule when we reached the palace at 5.30 p.m. where the Maharajah and the Prince greeted us with old-world courtesy, garlanding us to the particular delight of my friends.

Next morning the Prince took us out in a tourist cart to his father's

private jungle of some 3,800 acres, situated about six miles away. The country consisted of low, rolling hills; the soil was very dry and clothed with dwarf *babul*. The Yuvarajah complained that the townspeople from Wankaner made inroads into his father's forest, cutting the sparse timber for firewood and poaching, if they got the chance.

We came to a palisaded house where the private salaried range officer and two forest guards in the employment of the Maharajah resided. These turned out and gave the Yuvarajah—and ourselves—a big salute.

Picking up one of the guards, we motored along the rough tracks winding around the hills and sometimes across them, if the ground permitted, meeting sixteen blue bulls, the colloquial name for Nilgai, in small batches, the largest consisting of five members, all male. We also disturbed two *chinkara*, a species of antelope smaller in size than blackbuck, a lone fox, and numerous sand grouse. The Yuvarajah told us that black partridge and sand grouse visited the area in large numbers during the monsoons, but went away with the approach of summer. The estate was covered with porcupine diggings and burrows.

The Yuvarajah invited us to stop over another day and *motor* with him to see the famous 'wild asses of Kutch.' These animals, of the donkey family but standing almost as high as mules, live in an area of this dry land somewhat over a hundred miles to the north of Wankaner. Unfortunately we were bound to a tight programme and just could not spare the time. Returning to the palace, we were struck by the large numbers of wild peafowl that strutted about and called to each other. Even the extensive grounds of the palace were full of them. Nobody shoots these beautiful birds in Gujarat. 'Pea-or! Pea-or!', their cries echoed from all around.

The Yuvarajah, who had appointed himself as our guide, took us next to his private farm, situated on the outskirts of the township of Wankaner, where we were shown around a lovely guest house that he was remodelling, with excellent furniture and, of all things, an up-to-date swimming pool, something unheard of in this arid land.

Close by was an ancient well, with steps of pure marble leading down to two terraces built into the sides of the well. From the centre of the well spouted a fountain of water that reached up to the higher terrace and then splashed down to cover everything, including part of the lower terrace, with a fine mist. We felt delightfully cool, as if we were standing on an air-conditioned verandah.

After lunch we left to motor to the capital city of Ahmedabad, 140 miles distant. I felt as if I were in another world, the countryside being totally different from that of southern India. It was a parched area,

semi-desert, and this fact was emphasised by the strings of camels we passed on the road, their numbers sometimes assuming the proportions of a caravan. Seated on these animals were wild-looking men and women in curious array. Other camels carried their household effects, string-cots, all sizes of pots and pans, immense heaps of clothing tied into bundles, and miscellaneous other articles that could scarcely be identified. The afternoon was exceedingly hot. As we approached Ahmedabad, the country became slightly greener. It was evening when we reached our destination.

Part of our programme the following morning was to visit the Nal Sarovar lake, a bird sanctuary and a bird-watchers' paradise, but this had to be dropped. Due to two very severe summers in succession when the monsoons had failed, the lake had dried up completely. So we visited the local zoo instead, where we saw a large variety of animals and a collection of birds from all over the world that is really excellent. I was particularly interested in the snake-pit with its jet black cobras. No doubt owing to the colour of the local soil, which is very dark and known in these regions as 'black cotton-soil', nature has arranged that the creatures that live upon it should also be dark in colour to prevent them from being conspicuous, which would otherwise be the case.

Amidst a collection of tigers and panthers, and a pair of lions from Africa, were a Gir lion and two lionesses. This lion we discovered to be far fiercer than any of the wild lions we had met at Gir, even putting the 'bad lion' to shame. He repeatedly charged at his keeper and us, stopping only at the bars of his cage. Even the African lion was unfriendly. Assuredly, the big felines are far more docile in their wild condition.

That afternoon we took off by plane for the city of Udaipur, where we landed after a very bumpy flight of fifty-five minutes, due perhaps to flying over heated, almost desert land, barren, rocky and unfriendly to look down upon. From the airport we motored to the edge of a large and magnificent lake, boarded a motor-launch and chugged across to one of a series of islands that dotted the water. But this island was different from the rest, for upon it has been built a beautiful hotel, known as the Lake Palace Hotel, with sixty-five rooms that, for the most part, directly overlook the water. The building encloses an open-air garden, abounding with trees and flowering shrubs. It is the private property of the Maharana of Udaipur, till recently one of the important ruling princes of India. He has converted it into a tourist hotel and is running it himself.

In the evening we went by launch to visit one of the neighbouring islands, where the Maharana has a palace which is also being converted into a twenty-room guest house with a magnificent

swimming pool. Some of the carving we saw in this palace were wonderful, being old Moghul and Rajput work of ancient origin. The Maharana has a huge palace on the mainland, too, and yet another on the top of a neighbouring hill. From where we stood, the hill-top palace seemed almost inaccessible, perched like an eagle's nest upon rocks at summit, it gleamed a pale pink in the rays of the setting sun.

The Prince also owns a number of shooting boxes scattered about the low scrub jungle of rolling hills that surrounds the lake. Around the city of Udaipur itself are the remains of a continuous wall, once built to protect it against the invading Muslim hordes of the great Moghul conquerors.

When the sun began to set behind the western hills and cast a rippling red-gold pathway across the waters of the lake, we heard raucous voices and saw a strange sight. Thousands upon thousands of green parakeets flocked across the lake from every direction to roost upon the huge trees that grew on the island. It is estimated that over 10,000 birds fly here to roost each evening, coming from areas over fifty miles distant. Each morning they fly back again to feed, but return punctually once more the following evening. This has been going on for centuries, as on the orders of successive Maharanas no one may molest the parakeets; this protection makes it possible for them to increase in numbers every year.

Packs of jackals could be heard that night, howling on the mainland: familiar and welcome sound, it brought back a hundred memories of nights spent in jungles, now far away in the south. The packs called and answered each other from shore to shore: 'Here! Here! Here! Heee-hah! Hee-yah! Hee-yah! Hee-yah! Yah! Yah!'

Then the following morning we took the launch for the shore, where a car conveyed us to the Maharana's main palace, a wonderful structure of white and black marble, with coloured glass windows, amazing carvings, and a rare collection of old armour and swords. Nearby was an ancient temple. And in the afternoon we set out for Jaisamal lake and game sanctuary, thirty-five miles away, passing through dry jungle in hilly country enroute.

In a little over an hour we arrived at the lake, an immense expanse of water. The Maharana has yet another two palaces here, on opposite shores. The lake appeared to be well-stocked with fish, and we could see them leaping out of the water and falling back again. The evening was bright and sunny.

We motored five miles into the heart of the adjacent, Jaisamal game Sanctuary to view a 'Panther show' of a different sort. The jungle was fairly heavy, but very dry. We passed two herds of spotted deer by the wayside, some of the stags carrying exceptionally fine heads. Our destination was an abandoned watchtower, constructed by a

bygone Maharana and converted by his descendant into a shooting box. It was built of stone and was three floors high, and the walls were filled with loopholes presumably for firing through. It looked like a miniature fort, and overlooked a narrow, shelving valley, through the middle of which passed a dry streambed. On the further side of this valley was a gentle, sloping hillside. There were small glades clearly visible to us between the trees and low bushes.

About fifty yards beyond the shooting box a wooden platform, roughly five feet high, had been erected. It stood upon four legs and was a more or less permanent structure. The unfortunate goat, this time a brown one, was tethered on top of it and beneath was a trough, filled with water.

We were invited to enter the stone tower, where four cars were already parked, through a low doorway at its foot and to climb a narrow stairway to the third floor. There we found a full house of people assembled; they were seated in chairs before all the available loopholes that overlooked the platform and its goat. In this gathering were a film star and her friends. All of them were chattering, smoking, moving about and hailing each other in very audible voices.

It soon became clear that, so great was the audience, if we wanted to see anything we would have to go down to the floor below. This we did and chose four loopholes before any more people came along.

I could not resist the temptation of asking the agreeable Forest Range Officer (F.R.O.) in charge of the operations whether the authorities felt any harm was being done by allowing us to watch the panther kill the goat, telling him that in the Gir we had not been allowed to see either the lions kill the buffalo or the panther kill the goat prior to the 'show', as that was considered as encouraging the taking of life. The F. R. O. smiled disdainfully. 'We are Rajputs', he vouchsafed by way of explanation. 'Those fellows are Gujaratis.'

He then went up the stairway to where the film star and her friends were gathered, and soon the chattering ceased. He must have impressed on the party that this was no rehearsal.

Staring through the loophole, I glimpsed a single spotted doe across the dry stream in the mid-distance, soon followed by bevy of after bevy of peafowl. Then dark forms filtered through the undergrowth: a sounder of wild pigs. Then a slight movement behind a bush in the foreground caught my eye. I stared hard. A panther crouched close to the ground. I had not seen him arrive. No one had. It was 6.15 p.m. The panther remained where he lay without moving. Obviously he was aware of people watching and preferred the greater darkness before he showed himself.

At 6.30 p.m. he moved slightly, but still did not risk an attack. It was seven o'clock and getting quite dark when the panther could

contain its hunger no longer. From where it was crouching, the spotted cat leaped neatly on to the platform, walked calmly up to the goat that had turned around to face its attacker and was straining backwards at its leash, and almost unconcernedly seized it by the throat. The goat bleated once and kicked feebly. Then the feline pressed the head of its prey to the platform and held it there for a long time, till life was extinct.

It was getting more and more difficult for us to see anything in the increasing darkness when the Ranger pressed the switch that was to bring the spotlight into play, but there was no response. The current had failed.

We could barely see the panther tearing at the goat's throat to suck the blood from the jugular vein. A few minutes later it leaped down from the platform and drank deeply at the trough of water. Clearly this panther had been through the performance very often before and knew exactly what to do. Then it became too dark to see more.

The film star gave us a winning smile as she brushed ahead on the narrow stairway in the ground, and soon we were heading for Udaipur.

The next day was idle till the afternoon, when we left for the airport. We were bound for the distant city of Nagpur, from where we were scheduled to motor to the Kanha National Park. But there were many delays on the way, due partly to bad weather and partly to an argument at Delhi between the pilot and a passenger who turned up after the engines had been started, so it was not until early next morning that we landed at Nagpur. Rain was still falling.

But we had to be up again at seven o'clock to set off on a journey of 210 miles by car. Our entourage was of two vehicles: a car for travelling and a Land Rover for our use in the sanctuary, where some of the tracks, up and around steep hills, cannot be negotiated by an ordinary car. Meanwhile the Land Rover was hauling the trailer tightly packed with camping kit, a cook, a butler, a table-boy, and all manner of food for our use while we were 'in camp'. Also any number of bottles of Coca-Cola for my American friends. These stood upon ice in large ice-box, in rows like soldiers on parade. Nagpur is situated in Maharashtra state, while Kanha is in Madhya Pradesh. Thus we had to cross an interstate frontier and in doing so were required to sign a form. Our kit and foodstuffs were also examined with awe. It is not clear what the searchers were looking for, but what they saw must have puzzled them beyond belief. They passed us on without further argument.

Forty miles short of our destination the car became stuck in the mud. It had been raining heavily an hour or so earlier and the road was a morass. We got out to help and discovered we also had a flat

tyre. To jack the car in that mud was a problem. There seemed nothing to do but wait for the Land Rover to catch us up.

Luckily it appeared fairly soon. We climbed aboard, changing places with the cook and the other two servants whom we transferred to the car. We left them to help the driver in his struggle in the mud.

The road was in a terrible condition due to the recent heavy rain and it was a difficult journey, even for the Land Rover, encumbered as it was with the heavy trailer behind. We passed through three forest *chowkies*, or checkposts, in succession, at each of which were displayed numerous notice boards with warnings against poaching and other offences. At every one of these a fee or tax of some sort was collected from us. At last we arrived at the guest houses, for there were quite a number of them.

When, as we unloaded the trailer, I saw all the food that had been provided for us, I was lost in amazement. How different was this fare from what I took on my own trips in the south! There, after the second day, my diet invariably consisted of dried *chappatti*, often without butter. Roast beef was the luxury, but only on the first day. Thereafter there were *chappatties* only, and of course lots of tea. Here we had turkey, duck, chicken, mutton, fish, fruits of every sort. Not one *chappatti* could I see anywhere, nor any sign of beef!

So we set off for the jungle in the Land Rover, a forest guard seated beside the driver to direct him. Within a furlong we met herd after herd of spotted deer, some of the stags carrying amazing horns. Grazing along with these animals, and sometimes by themselves, were herds of blackbuck. Now and again we could pick out the almost black form of a mature stag with its white belly, but for the most part the males were young. Does, along with their fawns, were quite numerous. Peafowl were plentiful, and we saw two red junglecocks. One flew across the track ahead of us while the other ran along the roadside for a while before dodging into cover.

The red jungle fowl of central and northern India is quite different from the silver-hackled bird of the south. Neither species changes its habitat: the central and northern bird is slightly smaller, dark in colour with rusty red wing feathers, and crows somewhat like a domestic cock. The southern bird is larger, with a silver-grey hackle, and wing feathers that look as if they have been painted with heavy oil-colours in a very dark brown border with dark spots. Feathers of the same kind adorn the hackle in addition to those of silver-grey. It has a very distinctive call: 'Wheew! Kuck! Ky'a! Ky'a! Khuckhm!' It is by far the more beautiful of the two varieties.

We returned to the guest house at sunset to find that the cook had performed a miracle and our supper was ready. The dining-room lay just off the verandah, so that while we ate we were able to listen to all

the sounds of the jungle. Soon we heard a series of strange sounds, the like of which I had never heard before. Loud, trumpet-like cries, somewhat like the braying of a spotted stag, but with much more of the brassy resonance of a male sambar's note of alarm: 'Aa-hh-harmm! Aa-hh-harmm! Aa-hh-harmm! Aa-hh-harmm!'.

This was the call of a male *barasingha*! It is rather difficult to imitate that memorable sound on paper, but when you hear it, it is distinctive. And it is sad to think that in a few more years it will be heard no more. The barasingha, or twelve-horned deer, derives its name from its magnificent head of twelve tines, six upon either side, the word 'bara' signifying twelve in Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani. It is only very slightly smaller in size than a sambar, but is dark brown as distinct from the brownish grey of the sambar. Like the sambar, the stags have coarse, long hair on their flanks and around the neck and throat, where it almost resembles a mane. They are far larger than spotted deer.

Unfortunately, these creaturs seem to be rather silly, lacking the alertness of both sambar and spotted deer. They move slowly, heavily and sedately, and are slow to take alarm, slow to react, slow to run away. Nor can they run as fast as sambar, although the latter is bigger. The stags have the same habit as the nilgai or blue bull: they congregate in small herds of half-a-dozen without a single doe.

These characteristics have led to their downfall, inasmuch as they fall easy prey to the poacher, their principal enemy, in addition to marauding tigers and panthers, as well as wild dogs and even hyaenas. Barasingha, once plentiful in India, are now almost extinct. The Kanha Sanctuary, designed for their protection especially, holds but fifty-five of these beautiful animals. Kaziranga, and a few other sanctuaries, have rather more; but everywhere they are alarmingly scarce. Their future in India, together with the lion of Gir and the one-horned rhinoceros of Kaziranga in the northeast, is very bleak indeed.

I had not yet fallen asleep that night when I heard a tiger roaring. He must have been half a mile from the guest house. How good it was to hear that memorable sound again: 'Oo-oongh! Aa-oo-oongh! Aungh! Oo-oo-ongh!'.

We were away by six-thirty the next morning and very soon found the group of barasingha that had been calling the night before: five stags, all in a bunch together. Hardly a mile further on we encountered four doe barasingha, these also in a group by themselves. Not far from them we passed three groups of blackbuck and many herds of spotted deer, one of them comprising over a hundred animals. Bevy after bevy of peahens, and some isolated cock birds, scattered to right and left of us. It was a peaceful scene until we observed two jackals slinking through the grass close by, silent

reminders of the sudden death that can overtake the creatures of the jungle at any moment.

Leaving the park-like country that is the abode of the deer, the Land Rover took us into the low hills that surrounded it. Soon we saw a pair of bison staring at us from under the tall *sal* trees. The jungles of Kanha are very different from those of southern India. Stately *sal* trees clothe the former, tall and straight and beautifully green. The absence of lantana undergrowth is noticeable, also of the 'wait-a-bit' or *Segai* thorn, both of which make wandering in the south very difficult at times. This, and the absence of wild tuskers, which are dangerous and a positive hazard for the unwary hunter or greenhorn naturalist on foot, make Kanha a paradise for 'ghooming', the Hindi name for wandering about. On the whole, I would say the Kanha jungles are about the best for this purpose that I have ever visited.

The next morning we drove through heavy forests, covering over thirty miles or so of rising, hilly country to a high ridge where the natural teak opened on to an extensive maidan or expanse of low grassland, entirely surrounded by the jungle.

We were agreeably surprised to be told that the government of India tourist department plans to convert this area into a landing-ground sufficiently large to operate a Dakota plane service from Nagpur for the convenience of foreign tourists and local sightseers, thus obviating the long car-journey of 210 miles from Nagpur. \

This plateau overlooks a famous former shooting block, the Bandla Block, which still goes by the same name. Many old hunters who have spent their early years in Madhya Pradesh, which was previously known as the Central Provinces, will remember this area with nostalgic affection as one that produced some of the most magnificent tigers, for which these forests were world-renowned. On the return journey we encountered as many as seven sambar together, quite an exceptional number for creatures that generally graze in solitude; also many families of langur monkeys and any number of red jungle fowl, and the small barking-deer or muntjac. Returning to the low, and the country, we passed the usual families of spotted deer and blackbuck.

In the morning we were back again in the Land Rover, meeting once again large herds of spotted deer and blackbuck, any number of peafowl and a few barasingha. In desperation the authorities are now planning to enclose the barasingha within a high wire-fencing of fairly close mesh, covering an area of a few square miles, to protect them against their natural enemies, tiger, panther and wild dog, and of course poachers. It is to be hoped this succeeds, although by its adoption these animals could hardly hereafter be classed as living in a truly wild state. Still, I suppose that fifty barasingha within a fence are better than no fence and no barasingha!

By this time we were tired of driving about in the Land Rover. Three elephants, belonging to the forest department, were obtainable on hire, so we changed over to the backs of a couple of pachyderms and went searching the borders of some *nullahs* in the hopes of seeing a tiger or panther. But we saw only the usual barasingha and blackbuck.

At about four o'clock we took the Land Rover again to look for tigers, but we saw only spotted deer, peafowl, red jungle fowl and langur monkeys. A couple from New Zealand, who had booked elephants for that evening, were more lucky. They had gone separately on their respective mounts, and while Jack Doon, the husband, was returning he came across a spotted stag struggling on its back. A few yards distant crouched the panther that had attacked it, caught in the act of slinking away. The stag was evidently badly mauled and its spine had been broken. The elephant Jack was riding upon had only recently come to Kanha. A nervous female, it bolted twice upon seeing the stag and its assailant. When the mahout finally succeeded in controlling and bringing it back, Jack discovered the panther again and took pictures of it for nearly thirty minutes, during which time it climbed up a tree, jumped down again and then went up a low rock. Margaret Doon, while returning on the other elephant, came across a dead spotted fawn. For some reason its killer had abandoned the meal and now the fawn was being devoured by a pack of jackals.

That night an official who had arrived at the guest house insisted that we go out with him at nine o'clock and use his spotlight to try to see bison or a tiger. As a matter of fact, such journeys in vehicles with spotlights are strictly disallowed in Kanha, but being the boss himself, and for our sakes, he made an exception. We found a very large bull-bison, followed by a cow a few paces behind, but no tiger ; and when returning met the usual herds of spotted deer and blackbuck and, close to the bungalow, a couple of sambar.

At dawn the following morning the official took us out again, this time using our own Land Rover and driving it himself. We went to a natural salt lick, where a tower had been constructed, with a ladder reaching to a covered platform. This tower overlooked a large jungle pool in which the water was partly covered with beautiful pink-petalled lotus flowers. Within a few yards of this pool was the salt lick in a hollow in the ground. A sambar stag that had been at the salt lick thundered away at out approach, while from the pool came the flapping of a myriad wings and swarms of spot-bill and brahmini ducks arose, spiralling into the air with a whir of wings. As they flew round and round they uttered sharp cries of alarm.

We also disturbed other creatures: a herd of about fifteen adult

bison with half-a-dozen calves, all of them led by a huge master-bull. They had been drinking at a smaller pond opposite the watchtower and we had not seen them at first. This pond was to the west of the track we were motoring down, and in the park-like section of the country, while the watchtower and the lake and salt lick, surrounded by forest, were to the east. Thus the track formed a sort of natural boundary between the two types of country. The master-bull, with his following, saw us and attempted to cross the track to get back into the forest. We prevented them from doing this by racing the Land Rover ahead, or in reverse when the need justified it, so that the bison always found our vehicle between them and the jungle.

Maybe a dozen times we drove forwards or backwards at express speed, by which time we could see that the herd was becoming restive and the master-bull distinctly annoyed. The bison were within thirty yards and less of us; they made attempt after attempt to cross the track. Then the bull uttered a shrill, whistling sound and pawed the ground, shaking his monstrous horns at our driver with increasing anger. Then we let him pass. The herd presented an imposing sight when it finally thundered across.

The morning mists had not yet lifted when, little further on, we came upon a sambar stag grazing in the open, and still further two barasingha stags wanted to do just the opposite—cross over the open country.

In both our cases our official followed the same tactics, driving the Land Rover backwards and forwards to prevent them. This allowed my companions to take some good photographs. Finally we drove on and allowed the stags to go where they wished.

The usual herds of spotted deer and blackbuck were everywhere, accompanied by families of peafowl, and we were all in high spirits that morning by the time we got back for breakfast. At lunch our friend had a pleasant surprise for us. He announced that a tiger had killed a buffalo-bait he had ordered to be tied up the previous day. So our official inquired if we would like to accompany him on elephantback to try to see the tiger, and of course we all agreed. Thereupon he ordered all three elephants to be got ready, one for ourselves, one for another party of visitors who had arrived that morning, and the third for a young German and his wife who had also just turned up.

We sent the elephants ahead and followed in half an hour in our Land Rover, with two jeeps from the Forestry department carrying the other people. We found the elephants awaiting us in a shady section of jungle and transhipped. Our official rode with us on the largest. Following each other in single file, the three elephants approached the buffalo kill.

As is the case very often, the carcass was not where it should have been, and where it had been lying a couple of hours earlier when the scout for the forestry department had spotted it and come to report its death. In all probability, the tiger had spotted the scout in turn, and no sooner had the man departed than the tiger had succeeded in breaking the buffalo's tethering rope and dragging the dead animal away. The ground was thickly covered with dried leaves, but from my perch upon the elephant I could detect no signs of a drag-mark. It looked as if the tiger had not dragged his victim away after all, but had shifted it bodily by carrying the kill across its back.

Some tigers adopt this strategy when they want to be particularly secretive, so leaving no drag-marks behind. Others prefer it as being more convenient than a kill that is dragged along the ground and gets caught by bushes and thorns. In the former case instinct appears to tell them that its is more difficult to trace a kill that has been carried away rather than one that has been dragged, while in the latter case it is entirely a matter of convenience.

As there were no thorns and scarcely any bushes at this spot, its was apparent the tiger had carried its kill away to prevent it from being traced by the scout whom he had seen snooping around. There was also another possible reason: the disquieting fact that there were hide-hunters in the Kanha Sanctuary (just as there were at Gir), who remove the hides of animals killed by carnivora in order to sell them. Perhaps this tiger had already lost some of his kills in this way and was taking no chances.

The practice of removing natural kills can have disastrous consequences. When the killer is frightened away, he does not return to his kill. Thus he is getting less food than normal and he is forced to kill some other jungle animal unnecessarily, or a domestic animal (as so frequently happens in Gir), which enrages the owner and leads to retaliation against the carnivore. Moreover, after the skin has been removed, it is a strong temptation to the skinner to poison the raw carcass lying exposed in the jungle. Deadly poison—in the form of Folidol—is very easy to obtain on the explanation that it is required as preventive against crop pests, for which purpose it is supplied plentifully by the government. Also, it is so very cheap. The owner of the cow reasons that his beast has cost time and a great deal of money, and that after consuming the poison the killer will not be able to wander far and will soon die. Then the grazer will take the. tiger skin, too, and the money obtained for it will help to defray the loss sustained by the death of the milch cow.

Anyway, to carry its kill particularly a buffalo, this particular tiger must have been a large and powerful specimen. No cub, and very few tigresses, could accomplish such a task.

I dismounted from the elephant to examine the ground. A freshly broken leaf above waist-level and, a little further, a snapped green twig at about the same height, confirmed that the tiger had indeed carried the buffalo away bodily. There being a thick carpet of dried leaves on the grounds, no pug-marks were discernable; had the tiger dragged away its kill the dried leaves would have revealed it.

The tiger had headed directly downhill. The official whispered that a small stream, holding water in places, wound around the base of the hillock where we now stood. It was about a furlong away. With little doubt, the tiger had made for the stream.

I remounted the elephant, and spreading out to a distance of a hundred yards from one another, the three elephants with their parties now moved slowly downhill in line. The elephant on which my friend and I were riding was in the centre; the German and his wife were to our right, and the other party to our left. A belt of thick-growing green trees revealed the presence of the stream, and as we reached the high bank overlooking it we heard a low growl to our right and were just in time to see the hindquarters of a tiger in full flight with its tail. The German couple heard the growl too, and from their position to our right had a clear view of the tiger as it came bounding along the streambed. The next instant it saw them, changed direction abruptly, and scrambled up the further bank of the *nullah*, to vanish from sight.

Down below us lay the half-eaten remains of the dead buffalo within a foot of a pool of water trapped in the drying bed of the stream. Of the tiger we heard or saw no more. Much disappointed, we returned to where we had left the Land Rover and the two jeeps, changed into them, and were soon back at the guest house. In the afternoon we were on our way back to Nagpur.

On our journey we came to a large tank that was on the verge of drying up. Although there had been rain at Nagpur and Kanha, the area midway appeared to be suffering from drought. The entire village population had turned out and men, women and children of all ages were a foot deep in water, scooping the helpless fish into their baskets. Some of these were quite big, weighing four to five pounds each.

It was two in the morning when in drizzling rain we caught the plane from Nagpur to Calcutta. We were not scheduled to spend any time in Calcutta on this stage of our journey; we were to catch the next flight to Jorhat, a town in northeastern Assam, in an area known as the North-East Frontier Agency, from where we would have to drive by car to India's greatest game sanctuary, Kaziranga, to see the famous one-horned rhinoceros in its wild state, in addition to wild buffalo, barasingha, tiger and elephant.

I approached the booking-clerk to verify our seats on this plane

and book our luggage, when he blandly told me that the official concerned would attend to this work only at 6.15 a.m. The flight to Jorhat was scheduled for 7.05 a.m.

The one thing passable about the Calcutta airport is its dining-room. We had tea there and waited till the clerk arrived. He scanned a list and said our names were not among those of the passengers on the Jorhat flight. He admitted we had been 'booked', but that was not enough; our names had not been 'confirmed'. Mere booking was not enough, he said. Any clerk could 'book' your name. But the airline authorities had to 'confirm' that there was a place for you on the plane. For us this had not been done. And the plane was already full.

He advised us to wait another fifteen minutes or so. The airline coach would be coming from the city, which was nine miles away, bringing the passengers for this flight. Our luck might be good. Maybe four persons had cancelled their flights, in which case there would be room for us.

The coach turned up at 6.30 a.m. What was more wonderful, four seats were available! Then an official asked to see our 'permits'.

'What permits?' we asked in unison.

'What permits?' he repeated. 'Don't you know that you are all foreigners? Foreigners are not allowed to enter the N.E.F.A. area without a permit signed by an official of the government of India as represented by the Assamese office in Calcutta, because Jorhat is close to the Nagaland border, where foreigners are not allowed.'

We did not know, and said so with some heat. We wanted to go to Kaziranga to look at rhinos, and were not bothered about N.E.F.A. or Nagaland. He shrugged and said we could not board the plane. Then he turned away.

Joe, one of our American friends, was a professional photographer. He had made the journey to India to take pictures and publish them in a series of articles about animals. Every moment was of consequence to him in terms of money. He really blew his top at the news. The airline official merely smiled. 'You will not be able to go to the Assamese office in the city today,' he added. 'You see, there is a general strike in progress and you will not be able to get a taxi. All motor traffic is off the road.'

'You might walk the nine miles,' he went on, 'but the office is certain to be closed, due to the strike.'

Yet, in spite of the gloomy picture he had painted we had a little luck. We succeeded in finding a conveyance to the city. It took us to one of the largest and best hotels in Calcutta, where we were fortunate to find accommodation. The strike that had been threatened did not materialize, but a *hartal* (which amounts to the same thing) was in progress. We managed to get a taxi and went posthaste to the office of

the representative of the Assamese government for our permits. Here our passport numbers were noted and questions asked. We were told it would take a day or two for counterchecks to be made before the required permits could be given. Joe again blew his top. We just managed to get him out of the office in time. A few seconds more, and we would never have got those permits.

We decided to fill in the time while waiting by seeing as much as we could of Calcutta. Then it would not be necessary for us to stop over when returning from Jorhat.

We visited the zoo first. There we saw the three famous white tigers and their three half-grown white cubs. Light grey almost white in colour, they are certainly unique. One of the tigers is a beast of outsize proportions. Each of the six animals is housed in separated quarters. Then there is a *gayal*, a large animal with the body of a bison but with straight horns. It comes from eastern Assam and the Burmese border. Also, of course, the Indian rhino and a number of Gir and African lions. A feature of the zoo is a large lake within its boundaries to which great numbers of wild-duck of all varieties, migrants from beyond the Himalayas, find their way and spend four months of the year.

For the time being Joe was happy and seemed to have got over his irritation at the delay in reaching Kaziranga. But his pleasure was short-lived, for when we got back to the hotel at 5.30 p.m. we received the bad news that Indian Airlines had suspended all their flights to and from Calcutta owing to another *hartal*, called with immediate effect, due to the resignation of the West Bengal government.

The news made Joe furious. He wanted to charter a special plane to Kaziranga or go by car. Since neither of these things could be done, he became grumpy and sulky. The situation grew rather unpleasant.

All this happened on Monday, March 16, 1970. The last we heard before dinner was that, if the local government could sort itself out, we might be able to fly to Jorhat on the 7.05 a.m. flight on Wednesday, the 18th—if the permits came by then.

Tuesday (the 17th) was an uneventful day. We did some sightseeing by taxi in the morning and called at a few shops. By afternoon, however, the political situation had deteriorated; taxis were off the road and were replaced by truckloads of armed policemen patrolling the streets. We were warned not to attempt to step out of the hotel. Calcutta is crammed with over a million-and-a-half homeless people who dwell on the pavements. They cook and eat there, sleep there, and of course hardly ever get the opportunity to wash. It is unsafe for anybody to go out on the streets on foot during periods of political trouble of any sort, for these pavement-dwellers

are not slow to take advantage of the first opportunity that comes their way, and when law and order go awry, to knife a passer-by in the back. They have no interest in the contesting political factions.

The only ray of hope that reached us that afternoon was in the form of our four permits. Frankly, I had not expected these to arrive for a long time. We ate our dinner early and retired, to wake up before 5 a.m. and get ready for the air journey we hoped to make at seven.

I had to carry my own suitcase and airbag down the stairway from the third floor, as the lift was not working. Nor were the servants willing to be helpful in this hotel, because of the rule that they must not be tipped. The airlines office was a bedlam. Nobody would pay us the least attention and it was impossible to find out whether we could proceed on the 7.05 a.m. plane, or even if that plane was taking off. The airport was another bedlam. Nobody knew if our names were on the list of passengers.

Seven o'clock, then eight and finally three in the afternoon. We were still firmly upon mother earth. None of us had lunch and we were all exhausted—what with Joe wanting to do this thing and that, claim a refund in court, send a telegram to the President of India with copies to the Prime Minister and the American Consulate, and the incessant chattering of the Bengalis around us, which reminded me of the noise made by the thousands of mynah-birds when they return in the evenings to roost on the tall trees surrounding my home at Bangalore. It was a nerve-wracking experience.

Nobody could say at what time our flight to Jorhat would take place ; indeed, nobody knew whether the plane would fly or not. To make matters worse, the officials suddenly received instructions from their union to go on a 'work to rule strike', while the porters were told to go on 'total strike'.

At last, at 3.15 p.m., the loudspeaker crackled, somebody coughed, and prepared to speak flight no. 211 was cancelled! We were lucky to find a taxi to take us back and drop us at the hotel from which we had started early that morning.

Being of a stubborn sort, I made a jaunt on my own to the airlines office the same evening, to find that our luck had changed at last. All four of us were booked on flight no. 249 at 6.10 the following morning, Thursday the 19th. Returning to the hotel in triumph, I found I had lost my old room; someone else had already taken it.

We left at 4.45 a.m. the following morning to find Dum Dum Airport in the same state of strike and confusion. The fate of flight no. 249 was greatly in the balance. However, with the use of much animal cunning, elbow grease and some surreptitious *baksheesh*, we managed to work a transfer to a combined flight of nos. 205 and 249 in a Viscount aircraft which, seemingly to the surprise of the airport

officials themselves, and most assuredly to our own, took off at last at 9.30 a.m. None of us glanced earthwards at Calcutta as we left the city behind.

Five

The Anaibiddahalla Tigress

'ANAIBIDDAHALLA' LITERALLY MEANS IN THE VERNACULAR 'THE hollow into which the elephant fell.'

A stream winds downwards in southerly direction, having its source quite close to the forest hamlet of Kempekerai in the mountainous jungle stretch to the north of the town of Pennagaram in the district of Salem in Tamilnadu—formerly the Madras Presidency. This stream drops sharply at one point. It is a fall of about two hundred feet and it occurs in the region of granite rocks, so that the water has worn a deep hollow through striking the streambed over a period of perhaps thousands of years.

In the rainy season the water fills this hollow and rushes madly onwards in its course, but in summer, when the stream ceases to flow, a deep pool of still, dark and forbidding water fills the hole. Nobody knows its exact depth. Probably it is well over thirty feet. As summer advances and the heat increases, the level of the pool descends, leaving a sheer, circular wall of smooth rock all around, covered with slime and moss, up which nothing that has fallen into the pool can ever hope to climb back to safety.

That is what gave the place its name. For an elephant came along one hot season in search of water. The animal came to the pool and must have extended its trunk to suck up some of the water. Probably the water was just out of reach. The elephant extended too far, slipped on the slimy sides skidding down into the pool.

Elephants are excellent swimmers, but nothing and no one except a fish can continue swimming for ever. Some cartmen who were travelling along the nearby road to Muttur heard the elephant's screams and gurgles of fear and suffocation. They left their carts, seated themselves on the rocks, around the pool and gloated over the drowning beast's efforts to escape.

It is said that the elephant made prodigious but vain efforts to get a foothold on these slimy rocks. It slipped back each time.

The cartmen were so interested that they lit fires on the rocks and camped there the whole night. The elephant finally disappeared beneath the surface with a last shriek and gurgle in the early hours of the morning. It took over a fortnight before sufficient gas could collect in the stomach to float the carcass to the top. By this time the stench was awful, and it grew worse and worse as the thick hide and flesh fell apart in decomposition to expose huge chunks of rotting meat.

After that no creature came near that pool for a very long time. That is, not for at least thirty years, when a tiger that had been roaming the area and had started to prey upon men repeated the whole act by slipping into the pool itself. But that's another story.

Tigers rarely remained in this area for long, yet it was in fact the bend in a regular 'tiger beat' that resembled a rather wide letter U if laid upon its left side, that is with the opening facing left. The lower side represents the bed of the Chinar river, from the point where it empties itself into the larger Cauvery and for a little over seven miles up its course. At what point the stream from the north, along whose course lies the deep pool of Anaibiddahalla, empties itself into the Chinar.

Tigers were occasionally in the habit of swimming across the Cauvery and wending a leisurely way up the course of the Chinar, killing what spotted deer, sambar or pig they could find, and an occasional heifer or buffalo at the cattle *pattis* at Panapatti and Muttur along the way, to turn northwards up the course of the Anaibiddahalla stream, skirting the big pool and climbing the hill above it. They then continued another seven miles as the crow flies till they reached the bed of another stream, euphemistically known as the 'Talavadi river' although it is really little more than a deep and rocky *nullah*, flowing westwards for perhaps fifteen miles to empty itself into the Cauvery river at a point maybe seven miles above where the Chinar river itself joins the Cauvery. The Talavadi stream, of course, is represented by the upper side of the letter U lying on its left side.

As I have related, these wandering tigers from across the Cauvery would stroll eastwards up the Chinar river, then turn northwards up the Anaibiddahalla stream and finally return westwards down the Talavadi *nullah* to reach the Cauvery and swim across it once more to

the Kollegal bank on the opposite side.

It was interesting to note that the tigers always followed this course and never came in the opposite direction—that is, from the Talavadi to the Anaibiddahalla stream down to the Chinar and back to the Cauvery. I wandered across this area for many years and found it always so. I even questioned the poojarees who have spent all their lives in these forests, and they said the same thing. It is one of those jungle mysteries that appears to defy explanation.

These feline hunters had always been harmless, confining themselves to hit and run raids on the cattle *pattis* that lay along the beat if they were not lucky enough to find wild game.

What came in time to be called the 'Anaibiddahalla Tiger' was no exception. In fact it was no tiger, but a tigress. She would follow this beat approximately every four months. At times the interval would be longer. From what people living in the mud-and-wattle huts along the Cauvery told me, she would take a month to six weeks to complete the journey. Then they would find her pug-marks coming down the rocky Talavadi watercourse, taking advantage of the cooler sandy stretches that skirted the edges of the stream where the rushes grew, and the tall clumps of the 'orchid' or 'muthur' grass, till once again she had reached the banks of the Cauvery. Here, as her pugs indicated, she had spent no time hesitating. They led to the water's edge where, whether the season was dry and the water low, or the monsoons had broken and the Cauvery in flood, they would disappear from sight. The tigress must have been a strong swimmer.

Clearly, she had her home on the Kollegal bank of the river, probably in some cave at some lonely spot on one of the lofty mountains that rose abruptly in tiers from the river bank. Very definitely her mate was there too, for suddenly she failed to return to her old beat and a whole year passed. Even more than a year, in fact.

Then the tigress returned. Once more her familiar tracks were seen on the sands of the Chinar river as it wound past the cattle *patti* of Panapatti and this time she was not alone. Two sets of pugs accompanied her, one upon each side. They were small pugs, about the size of the tracks that would have been made by large Alsatian dogs. The tigress had brought her two cubs along.

It was most unfortunate that she had done this, for it brought trouble to the cattle, the herdsmen that attended them and finally to the tigress herself and her cubs.

The cattle that had been killed hitherto by passing carnivore, both tigers and panthers, had been few, and the herdsmen who attended them had not taken the matter very seriously. They could always get away with an occasional lie by telling the owner that the animal had died of a sudden sickness, or slipped and fallen down a *khud* or steep

nullah and broken its neck.

But this tigress, finding the cattle many in number and comparatively sleek in condition, decided to settle down in the area with her two cubs. It was so much easier to kill and to feed her cubs upon fat heifer or buffalo calf than have to wander for miles in search of food and then perhaps find none: she would have to go to sleep on an empty stomach and, worse still, so would her cubs. She knew from experience that when they were in that condition, as large as they had grown, they would still persist in trying to drink milk from her and that was a very painful experience. For the cubs had long and sharp claws that would tear into the fur and skin of her belly, and they had grown sharp and strong teeth that bit into her udders.

Kills began to take place in quick succession now, on almost every third day, for the cubs had keen appetites. No longer could the excuse of sickness or an accident be put forward to account for missing animals. They became far too many. So the poojarees and other low-caste villagers, who comprised the herdsmen that attended on the large assortment of cattle and buffalo kraaled at Panapatti, sent out a call for help to my *shikari* and camp-follower, Ranga by name who lives at the small town of Pennagaram, about eight miles away.

I have told you something about Ranga in other stories. He and a poojaree named Byra and I had wandered in these forests, mile upon mile, for many years, and there was hardly a corner of any of them that was unknown to one or all of us. Byra had been a poacher, and he remained one till he died. Ranga was a far more versatile fellow. Starting as a poacher, he had climbed the ladder of status to that of cartman, *shikari*, cultivator, and finally to that of a miniature landlord. He had attempted to kill his first wife and gone to jail for it, because he made the mistake of getting caught. Profiting from this experience, he had murdered his second wife after making sure he would not get caught by leaving a complicated lead to her uncle. Thereafter, realising it would be far too much of a risk to attempt a hat-trick by murdering his third, he had solved the problem by marrying a fourth, leaving the two women as a check upon one another while he got tied up with a fifth.

Leaving this place of many marriages for the moment and returning to the subject of the tigress, Ranga received the call for help and took it very seriously. He had an old muzzle-loader in those days. But it was a good weapon, inasmuch as it had laid low many a sambar hind that Ranga had ambushed over a water hole in summer, many a spotted deer, doe or fawn that had come to drink at the same water hole, and many a wild pig that had been so daring as to wander into the sugarcane fields near Pennagaram on a moonlit night. Ranga was certain that he could account for the tigress with his trusty firearm

without any trouble at all.

He sent word by the men who had come to summon him that the herdsmen should carefully conceal the remains of the next cow or buffalo killed by the tigress with branches of trees so that vultures would not find and finish it, and then to call him immediately. He would come at once, keep watch over the carcass and finish off the tigress as soon as she had returned for a, second meal.

The plan worked well up to a point. The tigress killed a buffalo and with her two cubs ate nearly half of it. The herdsmen concealed the remains under branches cut from nearby trees and sent for Ranga. Ranga came without delay, bringing his trusty matchlock.

The only fly in the ointment was that there was no convenient branch close enough to the carcass for him to build a *machan* upon which to sit up for the tigress. There had been one and only one, and it had been just in the right place. But the foolish herdsmen of Panapatti had lopped it down just to get at its leaves and smaller branches to cover the cadaver! Could they not have brought the leaves from somewhere else? The whole jungle lay before them for this purpose. They had been far too lazy. Why walk so far when a convenient bough was to be found so close at hand?

So Ranga had to look for another site for his *machan*. He found it. There was another branch on another tree. But it was from eighty to hundred yards away. The range was rather too far for a muzzle-loader, particularly at night when everything appears so distorted. Some of these old blunderbusses are wonderfully effective at impossible ranges for a shotgun to be of any good. But on a dark night, when it would be difficult to bring off a good shot even with the aid of torchlight the odds were stacked against Ranga.

The tigress came along with her cubs. Ranga had heard them coming. Soon he knew the tigress had started her meal; he could hear the growls made by the mother and her offspring as they quarrelled over the meat.

That was when he pressed the button of the electric torch he had tied with string to the barrels of his muzzle-loader. The cells were probably half-exhausted, for Ranga said he could hardly pick up the eyes that shone back a whitish red in his direction. Trusting to luck he pressed the trigger.

There was the usual roar of the explosion, the bright flash of the ignited black gunpowder, and the heavy pall of smoke that covered the whole branch upon which he was seated. Ranga knew he had not missed. He could hear the tigress roaring loudly and angrily.

To reload the muzzle-loader in the darkness, balanced precariously on a hastily constructed and unstable platform, was not easy, but he managed it at last. The roaring had ceased when he timidly depressed

the switch of the flashlight a second time, but now he saw nothing beyond the dim, dark blur of the carcass lying upon the ground. Of tigress or cubs there was no sign.

When daylight came, my henchman and the herdsmen, who had heard the shot at night and came from their huts, saw that the tigress must have been hit. There were drops of blood upon the ground, and later, by dint of careful stalking, they found the trail with smears and spots of blood on the grass and upon the leaves. It led downhill and across the Chinar, which at this time of the year carried running water hardly a foot in depth.

On reaching the further bank, a heavy outcrop of orchid-grass showed where the tigress and her two cubs had passed. More smears of blood upon the green stems indicated that the tigress had been hit somewhere in the right flank. There was no evidence that her right shoulder or thigh had been damaged, as the pug-marks she had left in the soft sand showed no signs of a limp, nor did the wound appear to be a serious one, as the blood trail was comparatively light. After the clump of orchid-grass, the tigress and her family had crossed a low thorny hill, on the further side of which the trail had petered out. Either the wound had gradually ceased to bleed, or a layer of fat or hide had worked itself across the cavity to stop the bleeding.

In the usual optimistic fashion of the Indians, Ranga and his companions congratulated each other that between them they had got rid of this troublesome animal. No doubt it would die of its wounds somewhere in the jungle or be drowned when it tried to swim back across the Cauvery in its weakened state. Of the fate of its two cubs they never thought or cared.

It was a dark night, just over two months later, when a string of bullock carts bumped and jangled down the three sharp hairpin bends in the track that led from the higher-levels of the hill above the Anaibiddahalla pool to the lush valley through which the little stream purled on its way to the Chinar. The vegetation was dense in this valley, and elephants and sloth bear, sambar and jungle-sheep abounded. The felines and spotted deer kept for the most part to the more open forest slightly higher up; the deer because they disliked getting into heavy vegetation where they could be easily ambushed by carnivore and the even more dangerous wild dogs, and the felines because the valley was full of insect pests and they hated the big ticks, the mosquitoes and, strangely enough, the tiny fleas that were a feature of this forest.

The leading bullock-cart carried a dimly burning lantern hanging from the yoke securing the two buffaloes that drew it; it hung just behind their hindquarters. There was a reason for this. The domestic buffalo is an abnormally stupid animal. If the lantern had been

suspended anywhere near its neck or face, it would refuse to draw the cart. Nobody knew just why. Maybe the beasts that drew the cart thought that they were home, so why go further? With the light behind them and darkness ahead, they thought they had still to go on. Rather illogical reasoning, I admit, but maybe buffaloes are illogical creatures. The cartmen had to use them in preference to the usual bulls, for the loads of cut bamboos were unusually heavy and the track stoney and steep. Buffaloes have more strength than bulls.

Admittedly, to hang the light behind rather than in front had the obvious disadvantage. Nobody, not even the buffaloes, could see what lay ahead. And when there was only one lantern to the whole convoy of a dozen carts, it did not help. But perhaps it was better not to see too much, on the principle that to see no evil was to know no evil. What I mean is, an elephant might be standing just around the corner or just off the track. Ordinarily, he would not be visible at night. Also, ordinarily, unless he was a 'bad' elephant, he would take no notice of a string of bullock-carts passing by. So why see him unnecessarily and become unnerved?

However, this did not always work. If perchance the elephant was not so good, or even slightly bad, he might not relish this disturbance of his privacy. Yet there was nothing the cartmen could do about it anyway. They certainly could not turn back. Try turning a bullock cart around hurriedly on a narrow track on a pitch-black night, with eleven more carts and eleven friends driving them behind you. Of course they could all come to a halt instead; at least the leader could. Number two would bump into him and stop. Number three would bump into the number two and so on. Would it help? Better to keep going. If the beastly elephant comes too close, beat the empty kerosene tin in the cart behind you, kept there for just that purpose. That should stop him. And if it does not? Jump out of the cart and leg it down the line of carts behind you. But do not lose your head and run into the jungle; there may be another elephant there. By the time the elephant smashes up your cart, throws one or both your buffaloes into the air in his exhilaration and then turns his attention to cart number two, you have enough time to be well out of the way. Besides, there are eleven other fellows behind you. By the time they wake up and realise all is not well, the elephant will have had a roaring time. The main thing is to save your own skin.

But what about snake? Poisonous snakes crossing the road? One of the buffaloes might step upon one; in which case, within two hours there would be only one buffalo less.

The cartman should always ride in his cart, not walk behind it for fear of elephants. One such cartman never kept to this rule. He had met a herd of elephants on this very track, but about seven miles

further on. It had been evening and he had been alone in his cart; so he had returned to the camp of the bamboo-cutters, to set forth before dawn the next morning. This time he walked behind the cart, so that if he bumped into the elephant he could fade away without being spotted.

However, the buffaloes escaped treading on a cobra in the track, but one of the cartwheels broke its back. The next thing the cobra saw was the man's foot. So he bit it. The cartman walked another mile or so, reaching the Muttur forest bungalow, where I was encamped, at break of day. I cut the wound to bleed it, and walked him about vigorously.

All to no avail. The poor fellow died in about two hours, and the police gave me no end of trouble for two days. Apparently, the fact that I had cut his foot with a knife to cause bleeding was highly suspicious. Perhaps if I had done it with some blunt instrument and concealed the blood things would have been okay. I just could not get them to understand the reason. I think I have told this story somewhere else, but it suffers repetition as it has direct bearing on bullock-carts that travel through jungles by night.

However, no elephant ambushed this particular convoy. But a very hungry tigress did, accompanied by two equally hungry cubs. They let the convoy pass, that is all but one. They attacked the last cart.

The driver was sound asleep when it happened, hunched up over the scraps of rope he used as reins, and rolled up in a coarse black blanket. He awoke with a start, to the sensation of falling through space, as the cart toppled down into a *nullah* bordering the road. He could hear deafening sounds; growls, snarls and the bellowing of his own two buffaloes. He did not know it just then but riding on the back of one of them, with her fangs embedded in its throat, was a tigress. A cub, slightly less than half-grown, but ineffectually into its side, while another clung to the hindquarter of the other buffalo.

The cart and all the creatures involved in this melee landed with a crash at the bottom of the *nullah*, which was luckily not deep. The cartman was thrown free, while the yoke holding the buffaloes snapped. The buffalo that had been attacked by one of the cubs broke away and bolted down the *nullah*, leaving the bewildered cub to join its mother and the other cub that were attacking the remaining buffalo. In another two minutes it was dead.

The cartman, hastily extricating himself from the entangling blanket, saw struggling black forms and heard frightful noises. By the light of the stars he scrambled up the side of the *nullah* to regain the track the convoy had been following. Away in the distance he heard the jangling and thumping of the other carts as they raced away from the scene. Those of the drivers who had been awake and heard the

pandemonium that had broken out behind them had guessed that something terrible was happening to their companion behind. Exactly to which companion they did not care nor stop to find out; the buffaloes yoked to the carts needed no goading to speed their pace. They knew the roars of a tiger when they heard them! Galloping behind each other in a jagged line, the convoy bounced and thudded down the precarious track, while running for his life, the luckless driver whose cart had been attacked ran behind to catch them up.

News of this event spread far and wide and the bullock-carts ceased to travel by night. This did not help the tigress, who became more hungry, and she had to feed her cubs besides herself. Nobody knew it then, but her right shoulder had been badly hurt; in fact, the bone was split by the lead ball from an old, old musket. It was Ranga's musket that had done the damage.

Driven by hunger, the tigress started to attack cattle by daylight. In this she was joined by her cubs, who were rapidly learning the art of killing, though the methods were crude and amateurish as befitted their inexperience. Their mother could not do much better, handicapped as she was by a smashed shoulder. Thus it transpired that each kill made by this trio of animals presented a nasty spectacle of mangled living flesh and torn hide and bone, a victim that had been partly eaten alive. It was all so different from the kill made by a normal tiger; a neat job in which the neck of the prey is neatly broken with a minimum of bloodshed.

These attacks continued for the best part of six months, during which time the cubs grew apace. They now required no help, but could kill expertly by themselves. Curiously, they remained with their maimed mother instead of breaking away and fending for themselves as cubs begin to do when about a year old. The killings of cattle and buffaloes increased as the cubs grew older and larger and their appetites increased.

Probably nothing more exciting would have happened had not Mariappa, the cowherd, instead of running away as fast as he could, as did all wise cowherds, rushed to defend his milch-cow when the three tigers attacked it at the edge of his field. He might have succeeded had the attacker been a single beast, but numbers bring courage, both to human being and to tigers.

If you should be 'ghooming' in a jungle—that is wandering about with the hope of seeing what animals you come across—or should you meet a pair of tigers or a tigress with cubs (both of which are today most unlikely to happen, I might tell you), halt and above all do not move. Do not start to run away, for that will attract the attention of the tigers which, just like your dog, love to chase things that run away from them. Take cover, by all means, if you know how, without

floundering about and advertising your presence. Above all, remain absolutely motionless. And never, I strongly advise you, start to follow them to see where they are going. There is a fair chance that you can do this in perfect safety with a single tiger, or even with a pair of panthers. But when a pair of tigers are involved, or a mother with cubs, the chances are small. Tigers do not like their family privacy disturbed for one thing, while numbers definitely bolster their courage. With elephants it is quite the opposite. Leave 'Jumbo' alone if he is by himself, and avoid a female with a calf, though you can drive a herd of thirty like cattle almost with impunity, even if you are all by yourself.

Mariappa committed the grave error of rushing towards three tigers lying over the lovely cow which they had just killed. I suppose he thought he would be able to save it. Very brave of him, but equally foolish. The next instant he was dead. Which of the three felines killed him nobody knows.

Six

In a Jungle Long Ago

IT ALL HAPPENED AT PANAPATTI MANY YEARS AGO. *PATTI,* AS I HAVE explained in earlier stories, signifies 'a cattle-camp', and Panapatti was one such camp. It is situated on the southern bank of the Chinar river, about three miles and a half from its confluence with the Cauvery, which is the largest river in southern India. The Chinar holds water only in the monsoons, and possibly a couple of months after that. For the remaining six months of the year it is a dry *nullah*, although both banks for a dozen mile or more from where it empties itself into the great river are clothed with heavy jungle, acres of bamboo, with *muthee*, tamarind and *jumlum* trees and other varieties in between.

When the monsoons end vegetation dries quickly in India. As a consequence the grass and the stalks of *chollam, ragi* and rice, harvested from the fields and given to the cattle after the ears of grain have been removed, becomes exhausted too and there is nothing for the domestic herds to eat. That is when the owners of the herds turn covetous eyes upon the forests, where the grass still grows and certain varieties of leaves and shrubs provide grazing.

Grazing licences are purchased from the forest department, and thousands of domestic cattle are driven into the jungle, where they are kept till the advent of the next monsoons, when they are driven back to the village again once local grazing becomes possible as the grass and crops spring up. As this is an annual performance regular campsites have grown up in all the forests where the cattle are kraaled

during the summer months. These sites in the south are the 'pattis'.

Panapatti is in the district of Salem of what is now Tamil Nadu state and was formerly the Presidency of Madras; hardly anybody outside a radius of twenty miles knew or heard of its existence. To my knowledge on only two occasions did excitement in any form come to Panapatti. The first of these was with the advent of an elephant that killed a few people, including a hunter that had come after it. This animal came to be known as 'The Rogue Elephant of Panapatti'. I have told the story in an earlier book.*

There was a lull of several years after that. Then notoriety visited the little camp for the second time with the advent of 'The Avenging Spirit', which I am going to tell you about. Let me hasten to add that this spirit was not a human phantom but a tiger that appeared suddenly from nowhere, earned a ghostly fame, and then disappeared as mysteriously as it had come.

The owners of most of the herds kraaled at Panapatti were rich landlords inhabiting the large town of Dharmapuri, about twenty-eight miles away as the crow flies. Three or four, of lesser importance, hailed from the smaller town of Pennagaram situated just ten miles distant. The herdsmen to whom the cattle were entrusted during their stay at *patti*, were the lowest caste of villagers from Pennagaram, augmented by a few 'poojarees', who were jungle-men belonging to an aboriginal tribe, living in the forest all the year round, sheltered in little thatched huts or in *gavvies* or hollows dug into the banks of the Chinar river at spots where that stream ran through hilly country and the banks were steep and high. This protected the inmates from elephants that crossed the Cauvery and walked up the bed of the Chinar river in the dark hours of the night.

Such a poojaree was Kaiyara. He had been one of the graziers regularly employed for quite a number of years in looking after the herds that came to Panapatti during the summer months. On an average the cattle remained in this camp for about six months in the year, and Kaiyara's wage was ten rupees (about 50p) for the entire period, plus a weekly allowance of rice or *chollam* or *ragi*. Not all together, mind you, for that would be gross over-payment. Say about ten pounds in weight per week, whichever grain was the cheapest available in the market at that time.

When Kaiyara had first taken service several years ago, he had had his wife with him and an only child, a daughter named Mardee. Then the krait came. It had been a very hot night and the slim, jet black snake with the infrequent white notches across its neck and back, had slithered into the grass-thatched hut occupied by the little family and coiled itself around the base of the dark earthen pot in which the drinking water was kept. No doubt the reptile was feeling the heat,

too, and relished the cool of the pot.

Kaiyara's wife had very long hair. When she lay on the floor of the hut at night, it had a habit of getting knotted or falling across her face and disturbing her. So on that occasion she had decided to tie it up with the strip of black rag that she kept for the purpose.

But where was that rag? By the water-pot. Talking to her husband as she did so, the woman stooped and her fingers closed around what she thought was the rag. Unfortunately it was the krait she had grasped.

The snake struck at what it thought was an enemy, burying its small fangs just above her wrist. Then it disengaged itself, slithered behind the water-pot and passed through the wattle hut wall into the jungle outside.

The woman hardly saw what had bitten her. Something cold and black, she knew, and then it was gone. She called to her husband and held out her arm for his inspection. Kaiyara looked and saw two tiny drops of red blood on her back skin. They were hardly half-an-inch apart. The poojaree recognized the marks for what they were, punctures inflicted by the fangs of a venomous snake.

He got busy. There was no doctor, no anti-venom injection, no hospital within twenty-eight miles. Only his dirty cloth bag, containing some powdered herbs and roots, could help.

Kaiyara knew nothing about lancing the wound and bleeding it. So he stepped outside, picked up some soft cow-dung, made a mixture of it with some of the powder from his bag, and smeared the paste thickly over the wound. Then he started muttering a mantra, over and over again.

Within thirty minutes his wife complained of great pain in her wrist. Also shooting pains in her abdomen. She said she was beginning to feel giddy. After another thirty minutes she could not speak. The last she had said was that she had great pains in her stomach. Saliva was pouring from the corners of her mouth. Her breathing was heavy. Yet another thirty minutes later there was hardly any sign of breathing. The woman was cold and limp. Her eyes had rolled back in their sockets. A few minutes more and she was dead. Kaiyara was left alone with his little girl, Mardee, to look after.

The years passed. Mardee was now a comely lass. She had grown into full womanhood, mature and well developed in body. Handsome, too for a poojaree aboriginal. She was her father's mainstay and looked after him well, cooking all the meals and doing the chores in their tiny household. She also went out with the cattle at dawn and grazed them till sunset, returning with the herds of beasts as they ambled home in the evenings when the sun sank behind the jagged hillocks to the west on the bank of the Chinar.

Many of the poor herdsmen and a number of the poojarees coveted her and came to Kaiyara with proposals of marriage. To strengthen their suits, some were prepared to forego the usual dowry which every father had to pay the bridegroom and his family before a daughter could be married. Mardee spurned all her suitors. Young as she was, the girl was of a determined nature; she would have nothing to do with common herdsmen or poojarees.

Then one day, Sathynarayan came to Panapatti. He was the eldest son of his father, Gopalswamy of Dharmapuri, a rich landlord and merchant who owned over two hundred head of cattle grazing at Panapatti. Sathynarayan was also married and had a wife and young son. But they stayed behind at Dharmapuri when he came to Panapatti to inspect his father's herd. Sathynarayan arrived at a comfortable time of the morning when the herds had already been taken out for graze: about nine o' clock. The cattle had been driven out as the sun's rays were just rising above the Muttur Ridge, four miles to the east, to melt away the heavy mists that clothed the valley of the Chinar and the sloping land on both its banks, and to send the wild elephants into the dense bamboos for shelter, and the sambar into the hills.

He left his car on the main road with his chauffeur and walked the two miles of jungle track that brought him to the *patti*. It was a filthy track, Sathynarayan thought; the earth was several inches deep in layers of cow-dung, deposited year after year by successive herds of cattle and buffaloes. He stepped delicately, avoiding the more recent patches of dung for fear of soiling his shoes.

Soon he stood at the doorway of Kaiyara's hut and coughed loudly; then he spat. It was utterly beneath his dignity to call the inmate by name. The poojaree had watched his employer's son approaching. He crawled through the low doorway and prostrated himself on hands and knees, touching his forehead to the ground, the customary salutation of a poojaree in the old days.

'What news?' inquired the young man curtly.

'All is well, *Swamy,*' replied the poojaree regaining his feet. 'By the grace of the gods, none of your revered father's cattle have been taken away by the ferocious wild beasts that fill this forest nor stricken by the cursed foot-and-mouth sickness. I give thanks daily to the gods for their mercy. The animals have been driven out to graze under the care of my unworthy daughter.'

'So that is how you earn your keep?' asked Sathynarayan pointedly. 'By sending the cattle out in charge of a girl while you sleep in your hut. What can she do if a wild animal should attack?'

The father was silent, then he thought of a brilliant excuse: 'I was sick of the fever, with pains in my stomach and diarrhoea all last night, your honour, else I would have gone with the herd myself.

'You lie!' accused the landlord's son. 'However, as I have come to see the animals for myself, you must now guide me to where your daughter has driven them.'

Thus it came about that Sathynarayan saw Mardee for the first time and lusted after her greatly. He could not speak to her straightaway. That would have been beneath his status, particularly with her father looking on. He would have to look for some better opportunity.

The young man took a great interest in his father's herd after that day. His parent was rather surprised suddenly to discover that his son-and-heir, who had hitherto shown little liking for his business and none whatever for cattle, had developed an unexpected thirst for knowledge. So he smiled indulgently and decided to encourage his son. Probably it was just a passing fad and would soon wear off, when the boy would become as useless as before. Of course Sathynarayan's wife could not comment. Women in India are not permitted to question the comings and going of their men.

Sathynarayan timed his visits to a later hour, when he knew the animals would be grazing in the forest. Moreover, he avoided the *patti* and went directly to the grazing ground. Thus he met Mardee for the second time, and third and fourth time, and many times thereafter.

Although she was still a child, her woman's instinct told the poojaree girl that the young man had fallen in love with her, a sentiment which he was not slow to encourage with small gifts of money. Mardee had always aimed high, far above the local cattleboys and poojarees, and here was the answer to her dreams. A very rich young man; her employer's only son to boot!

Sathynarayan lost no time in seducing her. The jungle offered plenty of scope for that and Mardee became pregnant. Of course, the lovers thought that nobody knew of their clandestine affair. Actually everybody in the *patti* knew about it. The herd-boys had seen from a distance. The poojarees had gone one better: they had stalked the lovers and peeped on their most intimate moments at close range. Then they had run back and told Kaiyara.

The old man was astounded. Such a thing was unheard of; it had never happened before. His employer's son was a brahmin of the highest caste. Moreover, he had his own wife and son. Mardee, his own daughter, as a poojaree was of the lowest caste! How could this thing be? If he should dare to question the young man, the matter would be reported, and his employer, the father, would undoubtedly throw Kaiyara out of his job. So he kept the matter to himself for five months until it was evident his daughter was going to have a baby. He questioned the girl. To his dismay, she appeared to be not in the least ashamed. She admitted that Sathynarayan was the father and declared

he was in love with her and had promised to marry her.

At the very next opportunity Kaiyara screwed up enough courage to question the young man.

Sathynarayan flew into a towering rage. 'What are you talking about?' he thundered. 'Would I defile myself with your daughter, a slut of the lowest caste, like yourself? Who told you this absurd tale?'

'She told me herself answered the old man flatly.

Sathynarayan scowled, but said nothing in reply. He turned his back and walked away.

The next morning Mardee took the herd out again for grazing. It was clear she had not slept the night before. There were rings under her eyes and they were red. She had been crying. This could be understood, for her father had said that the young man had denied having touched her and had called her a low-class slut.

It was long past the sunset hour when the herd struggled back that evening. They came in twos and three, and a few of them did not come at all. And of Mardee there was no trace.

Darkness fell before Kaiyara fully realized what had happened. He begged the other men to come with him in search of his daughter. Some agreed. Others pleaded that they were indisposed.

There were no lanterns in the *patti*. Nor did anyone possess an electric torch. Each little hut had just one small oil-light of its own, a tiny taper of wick, floating in a little earthenware bowl of oil. There was no moonlight either, for it was time of *amavasa*, the darkest period of the month. Moreover, this is also the most inauspicious and dangerous period to be out at night, the time when devils of all kinds roam at will: evil spirits that sometimes appear as men and women, sometimes as elephants, tigers and other wild animals, and often as tall white pillars reaching to heaven. They would cackle and scream with unholy laughter when they came across defenceless mortals to kill.

In this atmosphere of terror the little party set forth, treading their way along the trails left by the cattle as they grazed in the forest. The only lights came from the stars that blinked down through the foliage. Inky darkness covered the ground. A demon might be anywhere, behind tree-trunk or bush, and might strike at any moment. A tiger or panther might lurk round any corner. Even an elephant could be three paces away and would be entirely hidden in that gloom. The men walked together, in a bunch, those at the sides making considerable noise as they brushed through the thorns bordering the pathways and getting their skins well lacerated in the process because nobody wanted to be the last man in line.

It was common knowledge that it was the last man who always fell prey to the attack of a tiger, a panther or an elephant. At least, if that

happened, he would cry out and warn the others, who would have a chance to run away. But if a demon attacked him he would just disappear in silence. Nobody would know about it. Then the next last man would vanish, and the next, and so on. No one would know a thing till all had disappeared.

In this fashion the little party crept forward, faltered and then came to a stop. Each member had worked himself into a state of abject fear and the feeling was infectious. By mutual consent they came to a halt.

'Mardee', screamed her father in desperation. 'Mardee, Mardee, where are you my child?'

There was no answer but the sough of the jungle breeze as it began to blow down the valley. Far away a tiger roared. Just ahead an elephant heard the roar and trumpeted in challenge. A sambar stag on the further bank of the Chinar caught the scent of human beings and belled in alarm. Once, twice and many times. A langur monkey, higher up the hillside, woke to the disturbing noises and grated his repeated warning to the other members of his tribe.

The search party wavered no longer. They turned and hastened back to the *patti*. Indeed, they walked so fast it was impossible to do so in a bunch. Somebody had to be last. But this time the gods were good: no wild beasts attacked him, nor did a demon strike him down. They all got back to the *patti*, but without Mardee.

As the girl had vanished in broad daylight, everybody thought she had been taken by a tiger. Had an elephant killed her, or a panther for that matter, some trace of her would have been found. But although Kaiyara, and every other resident of the *patti*, combed the surrounding jungle for a week, not a trace of the missing girl did they come across.

Then there came a clue. A lone cartman, struggling to get his vehicle up the steep incline of the Muttur track leading through the jungle to Pennagaram, remembered that he had been forced off the roadway into the ditch by a big car that had come up from behind and was trying to get ahead of him. Because of the gradient, all carts were hauled by buffaloes, as they were more sturdy than the customary bullocks, and more sure-footed. Unfortunately, they were also more stupid. When the car had come up from behind, the cartman had noticed that, strangely, the driver had not even once sounded his horn. Instead, he had attempted to overtake the cart in swift silence, with the result that the buffaloes had shied and run down into the steep ditch beside the road, capsizing the vehicle with its load of bamboos. Luckily, the cartman had been thrown clear, and as he hit the ground he had looked up to see who was responsible for this callous behaviour.

The car was Sathynarayan's. The cartman knew it well by sight.

Somebody else was driving but he recognized Sathynarayan in the back seat. He had been holding on to a woman. He had caught a glimpse of a red sari as the car lurched past at high speed. He said he did not know who the woman was. But Mardee had been wearing a red sari on the day she disappeared. Slowly the pieces of the puzzle came to fit together.

Normally, one could expect the Muttur track to be deserted in the early hours of the morning. The presence of the car-man was something unexpected. If a car were parked at a bend in the track where it wound around a stony hillock called Karadimedu (Bear's Mill), the owner could follow a short cut through the forest that would take him in about twenty minutes to the grazing ground where Mardee had driven the cattle.

The whole thing seemed to lead to a choice of two conclusions. Either the lovers had made an appointment which the rich young man had used as an opportunity to abduct her, perhaps with the intention of murdering her later; or unknown to her, he came upon her by stealth and had taken her away against her wish.

Kaiyara reasoned all this out in his mind aided by one or two of his companions whom he felt he could trust. He dared not speak of it openly. There were informers everywhere and none knew who could be trusted. Word would be carried to the young man, or his father, Gopalswamy. Kaiyara would then be sacked. That would be the least that could happen. He remembered he was up against moneyed people. They could pay *goondas* (ruffians) to beat him up, perhaps murder him. For that matter, they could bring a false charge against him of theft or something else. He would be locked up in the police station and be beaten up mercilessly. His cronies advised him to leave well alone. Treat the whole matter as the will of God, and forget about it.

But Kaiyara was a father. Further, he held a reputation at least among the herdsmen and his brother poojarees at Panapatti, of being a black magician who could cast powerful spells, and if he did nothing he would lose the reputation for good and all. He would be scorned as an imposter, a coward. His companions would say to each other: he called himself a black magician, but where is his magic now? If he were genuinely what he claimed to be, he would cast a spell upon the man who had committed this crime and that man would fall very sick and die. For everybody at the *patti* had reasoned out for himself what had happened, although none dared to speak of the matter openly.

A few days later, the night of *amavasa* came again, the darkest night of the month, when evil spirits are afoot and magicians cast their most potent spells. When the camp fire burned fitfully at Panapatti after the evening meal and the herdsmen sat around to chat

for a few minutes before retiring to their huts for the night, Kaiyara stepped into their midst and addressed them. He had adorned himself for the occasion. Red and white marks changed his face into a fearsome sight. A silver armlet above his right elbow identified his status as a black magician. A necklace of the large serrated seeds of the *oudarrachamani* plant encircled his neck, and another of large, black, glass beads.

He cleared his throat and began to speak: 'Brothers, as you all know some evil man has beguiled my daughter. Not only has he done wrong, but he has taken her away and perhaps murdered her. The days are bad and we are poor people. There is none we can approach for help. None will stretch forth a finger to aid us, for we have no money, while the evil man who has done this thing is very, very rich. But I do have this power which neither he nor all his money, influence and friends can take away from me. It is the power to curse him and his family, from the realms of the living to those of the dead. I will go in search of my beloved daughter. Maybe I will find her, maybe not. Maybe, I myself will not return. Should any harm befall me at the hands of this evil man, I want you to bear witness that I now curse him and his family. His life, and the lives of his dear ones, will be swallowed up for the life of my beloved daughter and my own. I curse him! I curse him! I curse him! By this thrice repeated curse, it shall be as I say.'

Next morning Kaiyara went forth from the *patti*. Only his close companions knew he had gone to Dharamapuri boldly to announce to his employer, the rich businessman and cattle-owner, what Sathynarayan had done to his daughter.

Kaiyara never came back. He was never seen again! The herdsmen soon forgot about him and the words he had uttered. Possibly his special friends thought about it and felt sorry. The poojaree had been foolish enough to put his head into the tiger's mouth, so to say.

Six months passed. It was the festival of Pongal and everybody was enjoying themselves. In the village the bullocks' horns were gaudily painted, red, blue, green, bright yellow. Upon their foreheads were long red and white marks of ochre too. Games were arranged and sometimes mock fights between men and bulls.

Sathynarayan and his wife and son, accompanied by his father, motored from Dharamapuri through Pennagaram to the point on the road where they had to leave the car in the care of the driver and walk the distance to Panapatti.

In fact this trip had been entirely the father's idea. Sathyanarayan certainly did not want to go to Panapatti ever again. The place held too many awkward memories for him. That damned poojaree girl had taken him seriously. She had actually believed the silly stories he had

spun that he was going to marry her and make a lady out of her. To make matters worse, the wretched girl had the misfortune to become pregnant, and to crown matters she had told her father all about it. The affair had cost him a thousand rupees, which he had to pay to the chauffeur, Das, to gain his silence about the day they had abducted the bitch. Luckily not even Das knew what he had done with her body. He had made the driver get out of the car so that there would be no witness.

As if that were not bad enough, the damned girl's father had had the temerity to come all the way to their family home at Dharamapuri to inquire about his daughter's whereabouts. By a stroke of good fortune, his father had gone to Madras the day before. That incident had cost him another thousand rupees. This time Das knew, for it had been Das who had taken the dead body late at night in the spare car. He and the driver had weighted it with stones and the latter had dragged it out of the car and thrown it into a large tank forty miles away, along the road to Salem.

But all this meant that Das knew too much. Last week the driver had approached him with a demand for five hundred rupees. Sathynarayan had started to refuse, but had stopped short when he saw the smirk upon the driver's face which told its own tale.

Then Sathynarayan made a plan. Immediately after Pongal he would go for a big shoot, and he would take Das with him. There would be a shooting accident and the driver would be killed! Of course, a lot of awkward questions would be asked by the police, but he knew that his father would come forth with bags of money and the questioners would fall silent.

Now why, of all place, did his father want to visit Panapatti for the Pongal festival? Sathynarayan had tried to put the old man off. But as everybody knows, old people are very stubborn. His parent had got quite hot about it. He had even chided the young man with the disappointment he had felt when the latter's sudden interest in the cattle herd at Panapatti had as suddenly ended. And so the four of them were trudging through the jungle to Panapatti, having left Das to look after the car. The Chauffeur had worn another of his nasty smirks as he caught his eye before parting. Sathynarayan resolved that he would have to stage that hunting trip and the accident that was to go with it, without further delay. Das was becoming far too dangerous.

The four visitors reached the *patti* where the herdsmen and the few poojarees had made ready to welcome them. As the august patrons were of the highest caste no refreshments of any sort could be prepared by them or pass through their defiled hands before being presented. Thus the gifts took the form of green coconuts, which had to be broken before the water could be drunk, and huge sweet-limes

called 'sathgoodies', from which the outer skin had to be removed to get at the pulp. Gifts of this sort would be readily accepted, as there was no chance of the ingredients being contaminated.

The painted and gaudily decorated cattle were displayed and a couple of mock-fights between men and bulls were staged. As the animals were roped and held in restraint by half-a-dozen men on each side, these encounters were farcical and excited nobody except perhaps those who took part in them. The evening closed with the usual felicitations and, after consuming more coconut water, the visitors prepared to depart. They had taken care to ascertain from the herdsmen that there were no elephants in the vicinity and so they dawdled till a later hour than they would otherwise have done. Once again the sun was sinking behind the jagged hills across the western bank of the Chinar, but with normal walking they would reach the main road where the car awaited them before dusk.

It happened somewhere midway between the *patti* and the main road. Sathynarayan and his father were walking ahead together, probably discussing a business deal of some sort. The young man's wife, as behoves all respectable and dutiful Indian married women, was obliged to walk a few paces to the rear. This she was doing, leading her small boy by the hand. The child was tired and bored to death by the whole proceeding. He was crying.

It is not good for the young of any creature to cry in the forest. The jungle recognizes no law of pity for the young and helpless, only the rule of the survival of the fittest, which certainly does not include the young. There was a sudden snarl; at the same time a great tawny body with black stripes materialized from nowhere to seize the crying child in its jaws. The mother saw this and instinctively hurled herself at the beast's head to save her child. The two men in front heard the snarl and swung around. They saw the tiger with the child in its mouth rear up and strike the mother with its front paws. They waited to see no more.

Sathynarayan, who was younger, ran faster and reached the car first. His father fell from exhaustion several times before he also made it. Then Das drove the car at breakneck speed to Pennagaram to get help. No help was forthcoming at that hour, for the shades of night had already fallen. The next morning a vast concourse of people armed to the teeth, retracted the steps of the fleeing men and came upon the tragedy.

Mother and the son lay a yard apart. The tiger's great teeth had bitten through and through the little boy. His mother had been killed by the two great blows that had been dealt to her. "Not a morsel of flesh had been eaten from either victim. Upon the hard ground were no traces of pug-marks.

As may be imagined, pandemonium reigned at Pennagaram and in the nearby villages and forest *pattis*. No man-eating tiger or panther had been heard of for a hundred miles around. As a matter of fact, at this particular time the herdsmen of Panapatti and the fishermen at Uttaimalai and Hogenaikal and the other hamlets on the other banks of the great Cauvery river confirmed that there was a distinct lack of carnivores of any sort in the area. Being the dry season, and this year a particularly hot one, the sambar had taken themselves to the mountains and the spotted deer had gone to less dry area. Such carnivore as had existed, and these were few, had gone with them.

Where the killer had come from, nobody could tell. Why he had killed and then not eaten was a still greater mystery.

I had been on a visit to my land at Anchetty, a hamlet in the same forest but about twenty miles to the north when all this happened, but no news had reached Anchetty yet. I had later left Anchetty, walked to another *patti* named Gundalam, and then sixteen miles down the course of a stream I have called the 'Secret river' to its confluence with Cauvery river. From there I had come another ten miles to Uttaimalai, where the fishermen were very excited at having heard of the happenings near Panapatti.

There is a short cut across the foothills which brought me to the bed of the Chinar river two furlongs below Panapatti. I found the herdsmen and poojarees gathered under a tree discussing the recent event. They had not driven the herds of cattle into the forest for grazing for the last two mornings for fear the killer might attack either the animals or themselves—that is, the one or two herdsmen who felt that such a thing might happen, and they were in the minority.

All the poojarees, without exception, and the rest of the herdsmen were of the opinion that they and the herds were quite safe. The tiger that had killed was not a man-eater, for it had not touched the bodies of the woman and child it had slain! Nor was it a game-killer, for they had come across no bones or carcases of sambar or spotted deer. The vultures had not soared in the sky nor quarrelled over the remains of a kill for a long time.

In fact, this was not a tiger or a panther at all—at least, not one of flesh and blood! It was the spirit of Kaiyara, the poojaree, who had avenged the murder of his only daughter and of himself. The poojaree had assumed the form of a tiger to fulfil the curses he had placed upon the braggart Sathynarayan.

'Nor is this the end, *dorai,*' the eldest of the poojarees at the *patti*, and one who had been a particular crony of Kaiyara's, confided to me in an undertone. 'Not by a long chalk. It is but one half of the curse. The lesser half, in fact. The two really guilty ones have yet to die, the murderous Sathynarayan and the rascally car-driver who helped him.'

It is a rare thing for an Indian to confide his innermost thoughts to a man of Western origin. An unwritten and unspoken proscription exists against persons of another race and colour, to whom it is considered most unwise to impart secret information of any importance. There is a general belief that Westerners are extremely foolish, very callous, most disbelieving and, in fact, grossly ignorant of all matters not directly involving the five material senses. This prejudice is everywhere in the land and perhaps strongest in the minds of simple folk from the villages and jungles. It took me more than two hours of subtle and adroit questioning before I could wheedle from the old man the facts which I have already set forth in this story. Considering moreover, that I have mixed with jungle folk and villagers from the time I—and they—could walk and talk, I consider myself extremely lucky to have been able to get all the facts I eventually collected.

To me, of course, all this was but jungle-talk, the sort of thing one could expect to hear from superstitious folk. In my opinion, the tiger was just a tiger and nothing more. Perhaps it was a wounded animal and in pain when it saw the woman and child and attacked them in sheer rage. Maybe the crying of the child attracted and enticed it, perhaps even annoyed it. Maybe a hundred other reasons, but it was only a flesh-and-blood tiger. From this followed the next thought that, although for some unaccountable reason it had not eaten either of its victims, it might attack again at any time. Accordingly I made arrangements to try to shoot it. At that time I was not working, so the time factor did not count and I was in not hurry to return to city life.

As I have related in other books, most man-eaters follow a regular 'beat' in the territory where they operate. By this I mean that they follow a definite itinerary in moving from one jungle area to another, past particular villages, up the beds of or across certain streams, or along certain game-trails and fire-lines, in moving from one locality to another. Having moved this way once and killed and eaten a human or two here and there, they come back along the same trails and routes after a certain period of time, and do this over and over again. So, with patience and care, it is possible to map out the 'beat' followed by such a man-eater and to forecast with considerable accuracy when and where to wait for him in ambush, or try to entice him with a bait or by some other means.

All this did not apply in the present case. This animal had not killed any other human being anywhere for miles around. As I have said, it had not even attacked a single cow in any of the herds, nor had it killed a deer or pig as far as was known.

I enlisted the aid of the poojarees and herdsmen in the *patti* and scoured the bed of the Chinar river, both up and down, for several

miles in each direction in order to find its pug-marks and ascertain if it was a male or female. Search as we did, we found no pug-marks anywhere.

This tiger must have come from the east, therefore, where lay comparatively open country, scrub jungle which petered out into cultivation for miles around. No tiger could live, or conceal itself, in such conditions. It had to come from the forest. Tigers do not live in fields!

I prevailed upon the herdsmen to lend me four cattle from the herd that belonged to Sathynarayan's father, promising to pay for any one that was killed. I knew that the owner would not object under the circumstances, but nonetheless sent one of the herdsmen to Dharamapuri to inform the owner of what I was doing.

I found the poojarees in the *patti* disinclined to be cooperative in the proceedings from this point onwards. The ancient one among them told me, flatly that I could not expect him and his clan-members to help me to lay a trap for their dead companion when he turned up in the form of a tiger—not that he would be so foolish as to kill any of the baits I had tied up, or allow himself to be shot at. It was well known that no bullet made of lead could penetrate a spirit. Nevertheless, it was the motive of their actions in helping me by which they would be judged. They could not, and would not assist me in trying to shoot this tiger.

Money talks and so I was able to entice the herdsmen who were not poojarees to aid me. After much inquiring and tramping up and down, I chose four places as being the most likely for a tiger to turn up. All that I could do now was to wait complacently till one of the baits was taken.

Rather than be idle meanwhile, I scoured the forest from dawn to dusk searching for the pugs of the tiger up and down the banks of the Chinar river. As the herdsmen and poojarees at Panapatti were not keen on helping me, I sent for my old friend Byra, himself a poojaree, who lived at Anaibiddahalla, another *patti* about fifteen miles distant, and for Ranga who had accompanied me on many adventures. Both these men were expert trackers and knew the area for miles around. But the three of us searched in vain: not a single tiger-pug did we find. The killer had disappeared as silently and as suddenly as he had come.

Time ran out on me and the day came to go back to Bangalore. I returned the four baits I had borrowed together with a small gratuity. Normally, it is not possible to come to an arrangement of this sort and the hunter is compelled to purchase his baits outright. But this case was an exception because they knew for certain hat none of the baits would be harmed. How could they, when there was no tiger to harm them?

About two months elapsed and Das, the driver, was returning alone to Dharamapuri in the big family car from the city of Salem, sixty-five miles away, where he had taken Sathynarayan's father for admission to hospital for removal of a cataract. Das had left the old man there and was hurrying back for dinner. He had forty miles to go to reach his home in Dharamapuri. The road narrowed down to traverse the winding bund of a large deep tank. There appeared to be no traffic in sight and Das accelerated.

Then something must have happened to the steering, or may be a front tyre blew out. Nobody knows for certain. The only witnesses were two villagers hurrying homewards who saw the whole incident. The car left the roadway suddenly at a point where the road turned left, crashed through the thin brick wall bordering the bund directly ahead and plunged headlong into the tank.

Das had closed the windows. He was trapped in the car and his body was recovered a week later when the vehicle was hauled out by the police.

Was it coincidence that he was drowned in the very tank into which he had thrown the body of Kaiyara after his master and he had murdered the poojaree and weighted the body with a stone? Sathynarayan heard the news and madness fell upon him. First, his only son, then his wife. Now the chauffeur, Das.

Sathynarayan remembered the murder of the old poojaree and his daughter before him. Tales had been carried to him about the curse the old man had uttered against him and he became convinced it was his turn next. At that moment, Sathynarayan realized he must die. Thus his mind gave way. His father returned from hospital to find his son a lunatic. The old man did not spare expense. He took Sathynarayan to Salem and consulted the best of doctors. The boy kept repeating the names of Kaiyara and Mardee in his raving but the doctors could do nothing to cure him.

Sathynarayan was then taken to Madras, and admitted to a mental home. The psychiatrist discovered that the mania arose from some connection in the madman's mind with the two persons whose names he kept muttering. However, no treatment was effective and the father became reconciled to the fact that his son and heir was permanently insane. The young man was brought home, where he was given two male attendants to look after him night and day. His father hoped that he would improve with time.

In this he was doomed to disappointment. His son became worse and grew violent, whereas before he had been but a gibbering maniac. The old man reluctantly decided that he would have to put him into the asylum at Madras as a permanent inmate. But this was not to be, for the curse of Kaiyara had yet to exact its full toll—or so people

said!

Sathynarayan was missing from his room when his attendant brought his breakfast early one morning. He had been there the evening before. A search was made all over the town but nobody remembered to have seen him anywhere. They young man was well known and somebody would have noticed his movements. It was four days later when vultures spiralled the sky above the track that leads from the main road to the cattle kraal at Panapatti. They flew in wide circles, which narrowed as the birds of prey rapidly increased in numbers. Then, one after another, they plummetted to earth, their wing-feathers emitting a loud rattling noise as they tore through the air.

Byra saw the vultures and heard the sound. He had taken employment that year among the graziers at Panapatti and was driving a herd of cattle to the forest for grazing. He knew the vultures had spotted a 'kill', and being a hunter from childhood he went to investigate. Perhaps there might be some meat for him to eat.

The kill was easy to find. The discordant screeching noise made by the vultures led him to it unerringly. The birds were gathered round in a circle and had not yet begun to feed. For they were afraid!

The reason for that fear lay in the fact that dead thing they were contemplating was a human body. It was Sathynarayan, and he had been killed by a tiger. But no part of his flesh had been eaten.

Byra told me, the next time we met, that he and the other poojarees and herdsmen had searched the whole area thoroughly for pug-marks, but they had found none. Then he shrugged: 'How could we *dorai*?' he asked. 'For it was no tiger that killed that swine! Kaiyara made a good job of it.'

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* See: Nine Man-Eaters and One Rouge.

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KENNETH ANDERSON

THIS IS THE JUNGLE

Introduction

The people who live in the wilder places of the earth, or visit them very frequently, whether in the Old World or the New in the Northern or Southern Hemisphere, form a strange fraternity irrespective of race, colour or creed.

They are dreamers, these people, usually not given to talking much; and because of that they are considered eccentric and unsociable. They shun human company. Their ideas are unusual, even peculiar, and they do not mix well. Give them the least opportunity and they are off on their own into the prairies, or the mountains, or the deserts, or the far-away islands, or the vast and lonely jungles. Bring them to a city - show them the bright lights, the gay places, the theatres, the cinemas and the dance-halls-and they are downright miserable. To this awkward, boorish and semi-civilised species I belong.

In the tales I now set before you, I have striven not to be boring. Records of hunting, for mere hunting's sake, do tend to become monotonous: they tend to become merely the diaries of blood-thirsty killers. Here I have tried to introduce among my hunting stories some studies of Nature, and among the grim and humorous incidents the biography of a tiger.

In presenting this tale of Bagh, the tiger, my purpose has been two-fold. Firstly, at a time when few people have time to study nature and the animal and bird life that remains and which is being increasingly threatened with extermination every year, I have tried to record the typical life-story of a tiger under present-day conditions until its nature was warped by the hand of man. What Bagh did after that and the crimes he committed were the result of the changed circumstances brought about by his disablement. There may also have been an element of revenge against the creatures who maimed him, but even so, who can blame him?

My second purpose has been to weave into the tale some facts concerning the habits of that most magnificent of all animals, the tiger, whose very existence in India and a few other countries is in danger of obliteration by the greatest vandal God ever made-the human being!

In this and other stories I have sought to give a picture of the life and conditions prevailing in those places I love so well - the Indian jungles. Abler writers have extolled their beauty and delights with more facile pens, while a few have rendered great service for all time by compiling

books of magnificent pictures of the wild-life of Africa and India. Beside these contributions, my stories may still serve a little the growing protest against the wanton, wasteful and criminal destruction being waged every night of the year in India, Africa, Malaya and Ceylon, amongst the magnificent beasts with which those countries have been endowed. These creatures are mown down as soon as darkness falls, and until dawn, with the aid or torchlight, repeating rifles, muzzle-loading guns and in many instances by miniature mines concealed in the fields.

1 This is the Jungle

As a young man I found peace and charm and overwhelming delight in wandering in the jungle on a moon-lit night, or in following its dark paths by torchlight when there was no moon. The gleam of eyes, reflecting my torchlight, would leave me to guess the identity of the creature while it was still too distant for its shape to be clear. It was all very thrilling, and to increase that feeling of excitement I undertook these walks alone and unarmed. Rarely did these creatures attempt to harm me.

As a matter of fact, there are only two animals that might have attacked me had I met them unexpectedly. The worst would have been an elephant, especially if he happened to be alone or a mother with her calf. The other animal that would have been dangerous to meet suddenly when alone is the Indian sloth-bear - old Bruin, as he is affectionately termed. The buffoon of the jungle, he is quick of temper. His sight is poor, and his hearing and sense of smell not too good. He might not understand an approaching torch-beam until its bearer came around the corner. He certainly would resent it.

The remaining dangers of such walks, either by moonlight or in darkness, are the poisonous snakes that sometimes lie along the paths. There are five such varieties in India, and they certainly are not so numerous in jungles as people have been led to believe. However, they are there. So, as protection against snakes I wore boots reaching to the knee, with soles of crepe rubber to avoid making a noise. Of course, to wander like this in a forest inhabited by a man-eating tiger or panther, or by a rogue elephant, would be sheer suicide. I only undertook such walks at times when these scourges had not been reported. Coupled with night-watches over water-holes and salt-licks, or perched in trees beside game paths and rivers, or atop boulders, or in fact at any conceivable and favourable opportunity in all kinds of places, these walks have long been my chief pleasure and amusement. Even in the day-time I still sit beneath the shade of a friendly tamarind or muthee tree, listening to the cooing of doves, the trill of the green-barbet, or the 'tonk' of a magpie. Dawn and dusk are the hours when the happy crow of the jungle-cock, the quarrelling note of spur-fowl, and the plaintive cry of a peacock fall on the ear, to be replaced as darkness approaches by the chirping of the nightjar and the weird distant hoot of the horned-owl. Animals are invariably silent in the forest and do not reveal their presence. If they did, especially the lesser herbivorous species, they would not live long. Thus I might hear

the sudden dhank-oonk!' of a sambar stag, but only when he was alarmed or had scented an enemy. The sharp 'aiow!' of a cheetal or spotted-deer and the hoarse 'kharr!' of a jungle-sheep are heard under similar circumstances.

Tigers and panthers rarely call except in the mating season. The low drawn-out moan of an impatient tigress seeking her mate then resounds across the hills and dales, and from the deeply-wooded, dank ravines. 'Oongh! oongh! aungh! aungh!' she cries. A listening male might hear the summons and hasten to meet her and make love, while all other creatures would turn and flee in fear, uttering their different cries of alarm. The guttural sawing of a panther echoes along the game-paths, 'Ah hah! Ah-hah! ah-hah!'. But it raises less comment, except from the langur monkey watchman, perched wide-awake on a tree top. He shakes a branch and cries, "harr-har-har!' to alert the tribe.

If you sit still, you might hear bruin's distant approach before his shambling, black bulk comes into view in the moonlight. On a dark night you cannot see him at all. But so long as you are motionless yourself, there is nothing to worry about. The sloth bear is a loud and noisy customer. Snifflings and snufflings, grunts, groans and a queer humming sound that resembles a curious cross between the noise made by bees when swarming and a bagpipe being inflated, announce bruin's proximity. The humming indicates that he is trying to suck termites out of their hills, or as a substitute is sucking his own paw or the inner part of his thigh. Provided you 'shoo' him away long before he gets too near you, there is nothing to fear.

It is all very enchanting. Each sound tells its own story. There are the sounds of fear, the sound of love and mating, the call of hunger, and sometimes the cry for companionship. You get to recognise them all with time and experience.

The sharp shriek of a dying animal and its hoarse, inarticulate gasps as it spills its life-blood on the earth will rarely come to you. The killers of the jungle are far too proficient for that. The prey is forced to earth before it can voice a cry of alarm, and the death-grip on its throat is too firm and inexorable to allow the slightest sound to escape. The faint but futile drumming of hoofs on the earth, as life swiftly ebbs away may be all that announces the death of a deer.

All this comes back to me as I write, in a torrent of memory. Those wonderful scenes of far-distant mountains on the horizon, their peaks a serrated line against the sky, sometimes unrecognised as mountains and resembling cumuli gathering far away. Nearby is a wonderful display of light and shadow. That bright green, so different from deep

green; the yellow and brown tints in the leaves; the cool, dark shadows in the recesses beneath the mighty forest trees; the glare of sunlight, with brightly-coloured butterflies. The drone of a 'gold-bundoo' as it wings its heavy way from one boram tree to another; the twittering of small birds; the pleasant, loud calls of the larger varieties. The greyness of hot rock, from the surface of which rise waves of reflected heat; the reddish-brown of earth; the soft sands of the stream-beds; the emerald green of the grass, drying to rustic-brown as summer draws on and the sun's rays grow in intensity. The fresh smell of damp earth after a sudden shower of rain. The abundance of life everywhere; bird life, insect life, reptile life, animal life, vegetable life. These are signs to me of the goodness of life, and of the greatness and indisputable omnipresence of an all-wise, all-present and all-pervading Creator. To any man who might think otherwise I would advocate a silent watch in the jungle. All the wonderful things he sees and hears there could not have arisen by mere accident.

So let us look for a while at these regions of solitude where the sounds of men are no more and Nature reigns supreme. Cast your eyes upward to the jungle-clad hills and the mountain above them: they are the home of the lordly sambar stag and the pert little muntjac, or jungle-sheep as he is better known. Those rocky piles will harbour many a sloth-bear, each mother with two cubs clinging to her shaggy, long-haired back when she travels, and gambolling playfully at her side when she rests for the day. Lower down are the bamboo and grass jungles, home of the elephant and bison. The grassy glades abound in spotted-deer and four-horned antelope. Deep valleys extend below, running the length of the hilly ridges. A mountain torrent bisects each valley, and each little rivulet is the scene of many jungle tragedies in the dry summer months. For to the few cool, refreshing pools of stagnant water that remain the fearful animals of the forest come stealthily by night to slake their burning thirst.

But hunters, both human and animal, know this and lie in wait beside the pool or the game-trail that leads to it. The pounce of a waiting tiger or panther ends the lives of many who crave a drink, while the echoing report of a muzzle loading gun betrays the poacher's presence.

The rose-pink shades of dawn, mellow in the distance to shades of vermilion, blue, purple and blue-green. In a short twelve hours these colours will vie with the orange-red of sunset, deepening to blood-red, as if foreshadowing the tragedies that will come to pass that very night, as if to match the blood that will pour from the torn throat of some stricken beast.

Evening in a jungle is a charming time for a walk. As the sun sinks the

earth cools rapidly. Many birds that have been silent during the heat of the day now burst spontaneously into Song. If you are in the mountains, foremost among these will be that most melodious songster, the Indian blackbird, known as the 'whistling schoolboy'. His continuous, ever-changing, impelling notes for all the world resemble a happy schoolboy on his way home, whistling with joy at the goodness of living. If you are in a lower jungle, the magpie-robin is an ever-present and worthy substitute for the whistling schoolboy. Almost akin in rambling note and joyousness of tone, the black-and-white magpie-robin voices a melody nearly as loud as his cousin of the hills. To the right and left, speckled grey-doves softly whisper "kroo-ooo! kroo-ooo!'

The startling cry of 'wheew! kuck-kya-kya-khuckm!' brings the silver-hackled jungle-cock's salute to the departing day followed by the plaintive and distant 'miaow-miaow-aioow!' of roosting pea-fowl. In the undergrowth those little wranglers, the spur-fowl, fight their interminable duels to the accompaniment of a series of persistent cries, 'kukkeraya wack! kukkeraya-wack!. In the grassy areas the partridges call, kee-kook-kook-kook! kee-kook-kook-kook! kee-kook-kook kook!' at dawn and at sunset.

The sun sinks below the horizon, the red and orange shades fade abruptly and give place to sombre slate-grey hues. You are surprised to notice so soon a star-twinkling where, only lately, the rays of the setting sun had lit the tops of far distant clouds. Then comes darkness, frighteningly sudden. The birds of the day have gone to rest and those of the night take up their chorus far and near with very different calls and cries more plaintive. This is the moment when the jungle really comes to life. The flitting nightjar flutters to earth and says, 'chuck! chuck! chuck! chuck! chuck-ooooo!' as he settle on the ground, like a brown stone by the wayside. The large horned-owl sails overhead to sit on a tree-top or a high boulder; there follows a deep-throated 'whoo-ooo! whoo-ooo! whoo-ooo!'. Now the herd-boy bird calls across the distant valley, 'oooo!-ooool-oooo!, his voice resembling closely the call of the herdsmen to their cattle during the daylight hours. As night advances, the jungle that seemed in the day to be strangely devoid of larger animal life, comes alive. The creatures of the night stir; they waken to roam and feed and fight and love and live-or die, till the dawn of another day lulls them once more to rest. Mysterious rustlings can be heard around you. They come from bodies large and small moving in the thickets, but unidentifiable in the blackness of night; from crawling reptiles in the undergrowth; from insects of all varieties in the bushes, Myriads of moths, large and small, and winged beetles, huge and tiny, brush your face as they pass, while the subdued hum of mosquitoes reminds you that the jungle's greatest pest is on the move.

Now and again and far away startled deer call in the forest as they scent or sight some cause for alarm. The persistent repetition of such cries invariably indicates that the king of the jungle is on the move. The presence of a panther provokes a lesser outcry and one of shorter duration. Perhaps he is more skilful in his stalking; maybe he will sink away sooner when detected. Although a killer, like his large cousin, he has not the disdain of the tiger for all other living creatures. But when the tiger is really hungry there will be no calls of alarm; he will take good care to hide his presence and stalk unseen and unheard. The sudden death of a victim will be the first sign of his nearness. The distant sound of peeling bark and breaking branches, or perhaps the thump of a fallen tree, will tell you that a herd of elephants is feeding in a jungle grove, tearing down the boughs or pushing whole trees over with their great weight and tremendous strength to feed themselves and their young on the tender shoots of the topmost boughs. The herd is very noisy, the baby elephants squealing at their mothers' sides after the manner of piglets. Frequently a rumble like distant thunder is heard. But no sudden storm is brewing. The sound comes from the gases in the elephant's cavernous stomachs.

But a closer sound, a faint repeated scraping, as of someone sweeping the ground with a broom, with perhaps an occasional swish of foliage, is something that must put you on the alert. Listen carefully. Test the wind by its feel against your cheek, or if there is moonlight, observe the bend of the topmost bamboo-fronds or the nearer grasses. And do this very quick before the author of these mysterious sounds comes any nearer. Then silently take yourself off, moving with the wind and away from that approaching sound. For this is undoubtedly a lone elephant; and a lone elephant on a dark night, or even a moonlit night, can be a very dangerous visitor to an unarmed man, hiding behind a bush directly in his path, should a breath of wind betray his presence.

Panic is unnecessary and you need not run far. Go for a few yards. Move silently. Whatever you do, keep the author of the sound between you and the direction from which the breeze is blowing. Then sit still behind a bush, or stand behind a tree trunk. He will not see you, for his sight is very poor Gifted with the keenest sense of smell and of hearing, so long as he cannot smell your presence and you make no sound and remain motionless, he will pass you within a few yards and be none the wiser.

Perhaps you may glimpse the moon rising above the horizon of tree-tops. Majestically she ascends into the heavens, while the gold of her rising gives place to the silver of her splendour. Finally she assumes her normal size and bathes the forest around in an ethereal,

phosphorescent light, casting deep, black, mysterious shadows under the big trees... shadows in which you picture a lurking tiger or panther lying close to the ground ears flattened against its skull, while the eyes watch your every movement with hunger. But it is only your imagination. Neither a tiger nor a panther will harm you unless a confirmed man eater.

Should the night be moonless your nerves will run great riot. For then the darkness will be so intense that you will not be able to see even six inches before you except for the outline of the sky filtering through the canopy of leaves and branches. It will be too gloomy even for the light of the myriads of stars to penetrate the leafy shelter in which you are crouching, but you will be able to see the thousand fireflies, the fairies of the darkness, as they carry their tiny phosphorescent lamps through the air. They sparkle, they twinkle, flicker and flash; they glimmer and shimmer, glint and gleam; now here, now there and all of a sudden everywhere. At times their glittering pin-points of light synchronise, and then it seems as if a hidden photographer had used a flash-bulb for his picture, so intense and bright is the sudden flare made by countless numbers of these tiny insects lighting their lamps in unison. But that happens only once in a while, while independently each firefly shines its own little lamp as it wings its way through the air. It is the love-light and love-signal of a restless little creature, signal of that greatest of urges, the impulse to mate and procreate.

The boles of the giant forest trees, packed in close array, rank upon rank as far as the eye can see, are interlaced with clinging creepers stout and slim; some knotted, some thorny, some smooth; all stretching heavenward to the canopy of the sky and the warmth of the life-giving sun. Jungle flowers and orchids festoon the damp, mossy earth-banks, or hand in sprays of exquisite colours. Bees of all varieties and sizes are engaged in carrying pollen to and from the gorgeous flowers. The huge nests of the tree-ant, constructed of leaves gummed together and the size of four footballs, can scarcely compare with the towering termite earth-hills on the ground, at times ten feet high. Other varieties of ants, tiny and large; red, brown, grey and black, are each working ceaselessly in their own colonies. At times they may be met on the march in ranks of six and more abreast, or in single file, extending for a mile and more They move purposefully in the wake of a chosen leader. Are they looking for new homes? Do they seek food? Or are they marching to battle? Perhaps they are on a slave-raid upon a neighbouring ant-nest. Sometimes cemeteries of dead ants, neatly laid in straight rows, provide a clue to what has happened.

India will be much poorer, the whole world will be poorer - when the wild places of this earth and of this land are bereft of their animal life, and mankind has grown so materially-minded that the calm, sweet hour of solitude and meditation will have become lost to him forever.

May those who read these stories and who love the quiet corners of the earth and the humble creatures that dwell therein, do their utmost before it is too late to instil in the minds and consciences of grosser comrades an appreciation of these lovely places and their denizens, so that these may be allowed to continue to exist unmolested and unharassed in their natural surroundings. Many of these beautiful spots, as we knew them in days long gone by, have since resounded to the thud of the wood-cutter's axe. They exist no longer and have become barren tracts of land, victims to the ever-hungry octopus of human and industrial expansion. Glens that a few years ago echoed to the roar of the tiger and the trumpeting of elephants are now totally bereft of jungle life. How sad it is for those who knew them as they once were to visit such places again!

It is almost too late already, but there is just a little time and a few hidden areas left. If the public of India and of the remaining countries of the world that still possess them do not become conscious of this rich heritage now, and take immediate steps to safeguard and preserve what is left, all too soon it will be too late and this valuable asset will be gone forever.

It is my earnest desire to arouse in all of you readers a love of the jungle and its animals that will help to move public opinion to legislate for their protection from wanton destruction and slaughter. Should this book, or any of my earlier stories succeed even a little in achieving such a purpose, I will indeed have accomplished a worthy mission.

2 The Man-Eater of the Crescent Mountains

There is in the District of Kadur, in Mysore State, not far from the railway station of Birur, and west of the railway line leading to Shimoga, a towering hill known as the Hogarkhan. It is an outcrop of the lofty, crescent-shaped ring of mountains named the Baba Budans, or Mountains of the Crescent, as they are sometimes called, which enclose within their westward- facing curve a wide area of wet, dense, evergreen forest known as the Jagar Valley.

This valley is the home of bison and sambar in vast numbers, of ticks and leeches in millions, and of rainfall that far exceeds of hundred inches a year, making it a dense, dank, dark region where even at noon, the frogs croak and crickets and cidadas chirrup unceasingly, followed at night by the even louder, more persistently monotonous wood-crickets.

The Hogarkhan is situated to the east of the crescent mountains, in a land of dense forest but clear sunshine, sheltered by the higher range from most of the fury of the monsoon that blows in from the western coast of India for three months of the year.

At the foot of this hill is a small village, boasting a very lofty temple, built from the red sandstone of the area. The village takes most of its name from the neighbouring hill, and is known as Hogarehalli.

To the sough of the village is a large lake, called a tank in this part of India. Two footpaths branch off from the village and pass this tank, one leading up the Hogarkhan hill to a few small coffee-estates at the top, and the other past the tank for about three and a half miles to a canal, which we call a water-channel, that runs from an immense lake known as the Maddak Tank, formed in a valley entirely surrounded by mountains and hills.

The whole region, from the dense and dripping Jagar Valley to the west, over the Mountains of the Crescent to the Hogarkhan in the east, with Hogarehalli, the canal known as the Yemmaydoddi Channel and the Maddak Tank comprise an area of perhaps fifty miles from west to east by thirty miles from north to south.

Within this difficult and mountainous terrain, there lived a terrible tiger that came to be known as the Man-eater of the Crescent Mountains. He appeared out of nowhere. Some say he left the Jagar Valley

because the dense evergreen jungle, the marshes and the ticks annoyed him, to climb the hump of the Baba Budans and descend the sunny eastern slopes. Others contend that this animal wandered in from a quite different region, very far away, known as Lakkavalli and the Lalbaugh, because of the disturbance in the jungle, there as a result of a large dam that was being built across the Bhadra River.

Whatever the cause for his coming, he arrived suddenly and with malice in his heart against the human race, for he took Puttamma, a comely Lambani wench, within a fortnight of her marriage, as she was picking coffee-berries on the higher slopes of Hogarkhan hill.

When Puttamma failed to return home that evening, her husband was very angry. For one thing, they were newly-wed; and what husband on his honeymoon will tolerate a delay in his wife's return at nightfall? Dark suspicions crossed his mind. Perhaps Puttamma was being unfaithful or had eloped with a secret lover! After all his marriage, like nearly all marriages in India, had been arranged by his parents and hers. They had never known each other before the ceremony.

By midnight, the husband, Ramiah, was in a towering rage. He determined that at dawn he would somehow follow the trail, catch the absconding pair, stab the secret lover, stab Puttamma and finally stab himself! At least it would be an honourable way of solving the problem after the great disgrace the damned girl had brought upon him. Why, he would be unable to show his face outdoors. People would laugh at him, the jilted husband!

At break of day, Ramiah set out for the small estate where his wife worked as a coffee-picker. The maistry in charge of the gang told him she had not returned with the rest of the pickers the previous evening, and offered to make enquiries of some of the other workers.

Soon another girl volunteered the information that they had been picking berries side by side during the day. Puttammna had been chatting to her nearly all that time. She seemed very happy. In fact, the girl confessed with a coy smile and a sly glance at Ramiah, Puttamma had told her one or two private things about his prowess as a husband that had made the unmarried girl envious of her estate.

Very puzzled, they all went to the spot where the two girls had been working the previous day, to see what could have happened. And there the puzzle was solved. They found Puttamma's basket of red berries on its side and half-emptied on the ground, but no trace of her. Of tracks or a trail there was none, because of the carpet of rotting leaves that covers the ground and is encouraged in every estate as manure for the bushes.

Casting around, it was the young girl who had been Puttamma's companion the previous day who found the first evidence of the tragedy. She came upon a scrap of Puttamma's sari. It had been caught and torn off by the branches of two coffee-bushes which, at that spot, grew very closely together.

There was blood on that fragment of sari.

The discovery caused them to look more carefully, and soon they found a distinct blood-trail, while the pressed-down, sodden carpet of leaves appeared to be ruffled along the trail, as if something heavy had walked there or dragged something along.

They were mystified. Such a thing had never happened on that small estate before. Breathlessly, they followed the blood and the disturbed leaves.

A watercourse bisected the estate, and in the bed of it they found Puttamma - or what was left of her: the tattered sari, a shapely thigh and leg, a separated head with its face set in a peculiarly peaceful and contented expression, and the mangled bones of vertebrae and ribs scattered around. Of the other leg and of the arms there was not a trace.

On the sandy bed of the nullah were the pug-marks of a large tiger, and superimposed on them, in places, the smaller tracks of a hyaena, or perhaps two. That was why the leg and two arms were missing. The hyaenas had arived after the tiger had eaten and left, and had walked off with the missing leg and arms. For man-eaters rarely eat these parts of the human body.

There was a lull of two or three weeks before the second human kill took place; another woman, and again a Lambani, who had been catching small crabs on the shores of the Maddak Tank. This time no hyenas intervened and she was completely devoured except for head, hands and feet.

Further kills followed in succession; a man here, a woman there, across the wide area stretching across the eastern slopes of the Crescent Mountains and their foothills. A herd-boy disappeared as he was driving his cattle to water them in the evening at the small tank just outside Hogarehalli víllage. A Lambani poacher was sitting on a low tree overhanging a game trail that led directly to the Maddak Tank. He hoped a sambar or spotted-deer would soon come along. Instead the man-cater came, and the Lambani poacher never returned.

Why the Lambani did not shoot the tiger was never known. He could

climb no higher, for he had chosen a quite stunted tree; he should have made some effort to defend himself. Claw marks on the soft bark indicated next day that the tiger had gone up after him, pulled him down, and carried him off into the jungle. He was never seen again. Perhaps something went wrong with his gun, as occasionally happens with muzzle-loading weapons, and he was unable to fire it. It is inconceivable that he fired and missed and that the tiger had still come on. Yet that was precisely the story that gained credence and spread far and wide throughout the region. The man-eater was said to be fearless and invincible, disdainful and unafraid of firearms.

After this incident, the killing of humans ceased for a long time. Probably the tiger returned to its old haunts in the Jagar Valley, or wherever it had come from. There is no evidence to corroborate this surmise, for no human kills were reported from any of these places. But everyone was glad the tiger had gone, tension relaxed, and life soon returned to normal.

Then the tiger came back. Once more he started his campaign of murder, and once again he began it on the slopes of the lone Hogarkhan hil. A Lingayat boy, related to a maistry on one of the estates, was attacked and carried off while descending the hill on his way to Birur.

After that more people disappeared and fear fell again in all its stark reality upon the coolies, the villagers, and the cattle grazers throughout the area. Long before sundown all locked themselves securely indoors, and none would stir out, whatever happened, till morning. The coolies refused to pick the coffee, the villagers to till the fields, and the cattle remained in their kraals unfed, for to think of driving them into the fields or jungle to graze was considered tantamount to suicide.

About this time a German friend, who collected animals and reptiles for European zoos, and such things as insects and butterflies for private collectors throughout the world - in fact, anything extraordinary that lived - had asked my son, Donald, and me to try to get him a few baby crocodiles, as one of his zoos wanted specimens.

At one time these reptiles abounded in the Cauvery River, where they were playing havoc with the various kinds of fish, both indigenous and those imported by the Government to improve the stock. For this reason, the destruction of the muggers, as the Indian crocodiles were locally known, had been encouraged by the authorities.

Large numbers of crocodile hunters, out for skins, had Come to the river to take advantage of the Government's Freedom to kill the reptiles. Shooting them took too long and was too troublesome. So the

hunters had invented a more ingenious method.

They manufactured a special hook, which consisted of three large iron fish-hooks, each about six inches long, welded back-to-back and at an angle of 120 degrees to each other. This device was baited with tripe, guts and the skins of dead animals obtained from the slaughterhouses of the big towns bordering the river, and attached, by means of a ring through the hook, to a six-foot chain, which was then passed through a hole bored in a stout twelve-foot green bamboo stem, at a distance of about four feet from one end.

Large numbers of such bamboos, each with chain and baited-hooks, were then thrown into the river for miles along its course.

Crocodiles swallowed the baited-hooks, which became embedded in their throats and bellies. In panic they dived to the bottom of the river, dragging the long thick, green bamboos with them. But the buoyancy of the latter would eventually force the struggling reptiles to surface.

The crocodiles would dive again and again, only to be forced up each time till, exhausted, they would lie on the surface of the water where they could be easily shot or speared to death. By these means, the crocodiles in the Cauvery River had been all but exterminated.

As the prospects of procuring the young specimens were therefore not bright, at least so far as the Cauvery River was concerned, Don and I began to make inquiries elsewhere, and finally learned that perhaps a few young mugger could be caught shortly after they hatched from eggs laid on the banks or hidden beneath the sand of a larger lake which went by the name of the Ionkere, approximately six miles west of Maddak tank.

Our informant told us the strange tale that, if one went to the banks of the Ionkere at the right time, just when the eggs were being hatched by the heat of the sun, the young crocodiles could be heard moving about underground. It seemed a curious story and it caught Don's imagination, so he suggested a weekend trip by car to see if there was any truth in it.

We duly arrived at the Ionkere and walked around the shores of the lake with a Lambani guide, who confirmed that it was indeed true and that the young crocs could be heard underground before they broke through the sand to enter the waters of the lake. Don and I walked and walked, but no crocodiles did we hear underground. What we did hear from our Lambani guide was the story of the advent of a man-eating tiger a few miles to the north of where we were, onwards from the Maddak tank. He had not killed anyone near the Ionkere Lake, so the

people here considered themselves quite safe from the menace that was threatening their brethren a short-distance away.

The Lambani gave us a vague and garbled account of the doings of the man-eater as we continued to walk around the shores of the lonkere, listening for the murmuring of young crocodiles which, for some reason or the other, just would not murmur. Perhaps we were not listening intently enough. I confess that I listened more to the Lambani's tale of the man- eater than to possible underground crocodiles, and I know that Donald did the same.

By evening we had found no signs of young crocodiles, although we had seen a number of big ones floating far out in the lake, and had come across their tracks on the mud and ooze of the banks. The three of us camped beneath a tree beside the water. Shortly after dusk the moon arose, red and resplendent in the east, outlining the hills we knew so well as the "big Signe' and the 'small Signe' where, in years long gone, I had come to learn much about the habits of tigers in general, including practically the whole life-story of a mother and three cubs that had been born and lived on the ‘small Signe' till the family grew up. One of those cubs had later turned into a man-eater. But that is another story.

After an early supper around the camp-fire, during which our Lambani friend, who was an excellent story-teller, told some fascinating tales, not only of the jungle and of tigers but of the habits and customs of his own folk, the Lambani Gypsies, the temptation of the bright moonlight became too great to resist, and we suggested to the story-teller that We all take a cross-country walk for six miles to the shores of the Maddak tank to discover something more about the man-eater.

He showed no enthusiasm for this plan. In fact, he showed distinct reluctance. Supposing we met the tiger? So much the better; just what we wanted, we said together! In fact, we told him that was exactly why we had suggested the long walk. So we went to the Maddak, but saw no tiger. We woke the herdsmen of quite a large cattle-patti in the heart of the forest, and learned from them that the man-eater operated still farther north, in more populated areas. They had heard a good deal about him, but had seen no trace of the killer, nor did they appear as perturbed as was our Lambani guide.

We returned to the lonkere by moonlight, reaching its shore as the dawn was breaking. We got to Bangalore the following day, with no baby crocodiles in the boot of the car and only the stories of the man-eater to stir our curiosity.

It was quite four months later that I received a much-soiled envelope

enclosing a closely-scrawled letter in Kanarese. The postmark disclosed that it had been despatched from Birur. With the letter in my pocket, I went to the Police Station adjoining my home in Bangalore to seek an interpretation of what was written therein, for I could not read Kanarese.

A head-constable agreed to help me and after reading the letter to himself, but not without difficulty, as he said it had apparently been written by someone of poor education, disclosed that it was from my friend, Mudliargiriappa, the patel of Hogarehalli, from whom I had long ago purchased a camp-site of half an acre of land near his village.

The letter was an urgent summons to go there to help shoot a man-eating tiger that had killed several persons and had only a few days earlier walked off with one of Mudliargiriappa's own men while working on a field beside the Yammaydoddi channel, three and a half miles away.

I showed the letter to Donald, who was enthusiastic and wanted to be off without delay. I said, 'You go, Don'; to which he replied, "You come too, Dad'. And so we left next morning in Don's battered old Plymouth two-seater, reaching Hogarehalli, which is about 140 miles by road from Bangalore, at about two in the afternoon.

Mudliargiriappa was stretched out on a rope-cot on the narrow verandah of his house, fast asleep, when we arrived. He awoke all smiles, apparently rather surprised at our prompt response to his invitation, but hastened to conceal his surprise by becoming an obsequious host. He pressed us to drink large brass mugfuls of coffee, while a meal was being prepared for us of rice and hot vegetable curry.

To refuse would be very rude, and in fact we were hungry after that long, slow drive. So we tucked into the curry and rice, and ate it all. When this was done, we went down to the Community well, drew buckets of cold water, and washed by taking turns at sloshing each other with the contents of the buckets.

By the time we returned, old Mudliargiriappa had prepared a vast quantity of heavily-milked tea. I am a hearty eater; Don eats about three times as much; but the prospect of imbibing refreshments at this rate became frightening to the two of us. Long before we could shoot any tiger, or even hear more about him, we felt we would burst!

We joined in telling old Mudliargiri, thankfully but firmly, that we would try to drink some of the tea, but that must be the last. We just could not take in any more, solid or liquid.

With a bright smile, he agreed, adding that he had already ordered a meal to be prepared for us that night, and that as long as we remained at Hogarehalli, we were his guests, and that it was his duty to give us such poor food and hospitality as lay within his humble capacity. And we had brought a large roasted hump from home, and cold tongue, and lovely boiled potatoes, and bread and butter and jam!

But it became simply impossible to eat them if we were at the same time to devour Mudliargiri's frequent meals, which he took such great pleasure in preparing. Moreover, he sat with us to press frequent helpings upon us and see that we ate heartily. There was no possibility of dodging the issue: to refuse him would be offensive.

The position was hopeless. In whispers we agreed that under cover of darkness, we would have to feed all the good victuals we had brought to the stray dogs of Hogarehalli. Wistfully, Don suggested we might hide the potatoes and the hump, and perhaps nibble at one or the other occasionally. I toyed with the idea a while, and then sadly shook my head. They would not last in that hot climate. The potatoes would get sticky, the meat would go bad, the bread would be as hard as rock and the butter would melt. No, the dogs of Hogarehalli would have to have the lot.

The easterner always postpones the discussion of the main purpose of any meeting till the very last, and so it was not until nearly two hours after we had arrived that we sat down to talk seriously about the man-eater. Mudliargiriappa related the details more or less as I have given them at the beginning of this chapter, and when he had reached the end, we found that the prospect of ever to grips with this animal was very small. To begin with our informant had not bothered to discover if the man-eater followed any regular line of beat, while the area covered by this tiger's itinerary was colossal - in fact, almost 1500 square miles! We felt we had come on a real wild-goose chase, and that we had as much chance of finding this particular tiger as any needle in any haystack. We just could not know where to begin.

After debating at length all the aspects of the situation, which led to exactly nothing, Mudliargiri said he had prepared for us a room that happened to be vacant in a friend's house. We were to use it for all our days and nights at Hogarehalli. The prospect of spending the night in a small room in the height of the hot weather, as was now the case, meant tossing without sleep the whole night, bathed in perspiration and bitten by mosquitoes. We appreciated the old gentleman's kindness, but the time had now come to make a firm stand.

So we thanked him for his forethought, but, pleading the heat and

mosquitoes, we firmly said that we preferred to spend the night on the camping ground I had purchased from him some years before.

I might here explain how these many camping grounds of mine have come into existence.

Ever since I was permitted by my father to go out on my own, I have been visiting the jungles and remoter places of Southern India. The usual thing on such excursions was to spend the night either at the Traveller's Bungalows, or Dak Bungalows as they are called; these are provided on rent by the Government for just such a traveller as myself. Otherwise I stayed at a Forest Bungalow, which was just the same thing, except that it belonged to the Forestry Department and required prior permission from the Collector or the District Forest Officer of the area.

There were two very strict conditions governing the occupation of both Travellers' Bungalows and Forest Bungalows, Firsttly, these premises could not normally be occupied by the same person for longer than forty-eight hours and secondly, even if prior permission were obtained, the traveller was required to quit the premises immediately any senior government officer happened to come to that area and want to use them. In addition to these general rules, as I have already said, a Forest Bungalow required the prior permission of the District Collector before it could be entered.

These standing orders greatly hampered me. As regards the first, a hunting-trip might extend to at least a week or even a month, whereas after two days I would find myself with nowhere to stay. As regards the second rule and the question of prior permission, often enough I did take the trouble to secure permission, as much as a month in advance, but I had scarcely entered it when a forest range officer or police sub-inspector turned up, sometimes late at night, to tell me to quit immediately because some senior forest officer or police official, or the Collector himself, was on his way.

I always became angry on such occasions. Why should I quit? I had written permission to use the bungalow a full month in advance! It was a large building and there was plenty of room for both the officer and myself! If necessary, I was prepared to sleep in a corner of the verandah, or even in a kitchen or a godown or the garage!

No matter! The ranger or sub-inspector, with a contemptuous glance at me, would point a superior finger to the rules hanging on the wall. Did I imagine for a moment that the Big Sahib or Important Dorai would stay in the bungalow with such excreta as myself lying about the verandahs or even in the compound? Would he even be safe? Then the

contemptuous look would turn to one of suspicion.

Either I must get out gracefully - and quickly - or I would be kicked out! I remember one incident that took place many years ago at the Nagapatla forest bungalow in Chittoor District. I had obtained special permission from the District Collector to occupy the place for ten days, and had come back to it for a late supper after having been on my feet all day in the jungle, walking for miles. I then went to sleep, when, late at night, there came a pounding on the door. Sleepily I opened up, to behold a party of four or five minor officials, recognizable by their khaki uniforms, carrying lanterns and long sticks, presumably as weapons of defence and offence against snakes.

What did they want?, I asked

The Collector dorai will be here at dawn, they replied. News has just come, and they had to arrange things for him. So, out I must get at once!

Why should I, I asked? I had obtained written permission to be there, signed by this same Collector dorai. The bungalow has many rooms and I required just one room-the smallest. The Collector could have the rest.

No, no, they countered. The Collector must have the whole bungalow!

Well, there was the garage, or the kitchens or outhouses, I suggested; even a tree in the compound. Any such place would do for me.

They became angry. Did I not understand plain Tamil, or English, they asked. We said you are to get out, and now; and we mean it!

I became angry too. The Collector be damned. To hell with him, and you! I am going to occupy half this bloody I became angry, too. The Collector be damned! To hell bungalow, and the first man who steps into my rooms will be shot! That goes for the Collector, too!

I grasped my rifle with one hand, looking very determined and slammed the door with the other, fixing all the bolts.

I found it difficult to sleep after that. Heavy boots tramped about the verandahs; people coughed and expectorated; I could hear much whispering and secret consultation. No doubt that they were wondering what to do. If they attempted to throw me, someone might get shot. If they let me remain, the Collector would dismiss them.

The outcome was that they let me remain, The Collector was a white man and I was another. Like all white men, they were both mad, Let them settle their own differences, why get shot for nothing?

Next morning, the Collector arrived in his car. I stood indolently at the door of my room to watch him. He walked up the steps of the verandah before he saw me. Then he stopped dead. He stared.

Turning around, he shouted in Hindustani at the anxious half-dozen khaki-clad individuals beside his car: 'Did you not get word of my arrival? Why did you not keep the bungalow empty? Who is this freak, standing at the doorway?"

There came an answering gabble of pleading voices.

‘Sir, we came here last night, as soon as information was received of Your Honour's intended visit, and asked this horried man to leave. He refused. He threatened to shoot us. He threatened to shoot you too. We were afraid, Sir. What could we do? After all, he is armed, he is a white man - like yourself.’

‘White man! Shoot me!' the Collector thundered, turning to glare at me. Then he said, 'Don't you know the rules? When a senior officer comes on tour, anyone occupying the bungalow has to get out. Please do so.'

Nonchalantly I drew a letter from my pocket. 'In this case the rules are waived,’ I announced. ‘For I have written permission from the Collector to stay here for ten days, and I shall do so.'

‘I am the Collector,' he shouted.

I know that,' I replied.

‘Look, don't you understand English?" he asked. "The Rules say, when a Senior Officer ----‘

‘Don't you understand English?' I countered. 'Can't you ready your own handwriting? The Collector said I can stay here for ten days. You are the Collector, are you not? I will stay here for ten days. I am occupying half the bungalow. You can have the other half. It's as simple as that.’

It was midsummer and very, very hot. That night had been a close and breathless one. At about eight o'clock I saw a marvellous sight. The table had been laid for the Great Man's meal on the other half of the verandah by his chaprassi, obviously because it was too hot inside. There was snowy table linen, sparkling cutlery and crockery, and a cut-glass vase crammed with flowers. The chaprassi must have very thoughtfully brought them with him from headquarters, for no such flowers grew in Nagapatla.

Then the Collector came for dinner. Believe it or not, in spite of the sweltering heat, he wore a dress-suit, complete with boiled-shirt, bow-tie and all! In turn, I put on my oldest and most ragged khaki shirt and

torn pants and squatted on the floor of the verandah at the other end, munching my dry chappatties. The Collector, siting in solitary splendour, looked at me briefly and just once. He saw something that the cat must have left on the doorstep the night before, for he never looked up again.

After that incident, I felt I had enough of this sort of thing and decided never to enter these premises again. I would buy my own camp-sites, near my favourite forests. Rather an expensive decision, you might think. Really it was not so, for in those days land in out-of-the-way places and near jungles was dirt cheap.

In the course of time I have made several bargains without undue bargaining. Of course, I looked only for small plots land, suitable for camping. Half an acre was ample for my purpose. But sometimes I was forced to buy larger plots, when the owner refused to sell anything smaller.

At Mamandur, I purchased one and three-quarter acres for seventeen rupees, eight annas, roughly a pound and seven shillings sterling. My biggest plot is at Dassampatty, on the banks of the Chinar River, in Salem District. There I got twelve acres for a hundred rupees, which is about seven pounds, fifteen shillings. On an average, the prices ranged from twenty-five to forty rupees, or between two and three pounds, per acre. The most expensive was a quarter-acre plot for seventy-five rupees: a little over five pounds, in those days a really exorbitant price.

In the course of time, and sometimes without considering just why, I accumulated eighteen such camp-sites, the largest being the aforesaid twelve acres, and a number of two and three acre plots besides.

On them, in days gone by, I would sit and cock a snook at the Collectors and touring government offices in general. The Collectors have all gone. But the touring government officers are still with us, and in larger numbers than ever; and sometimes I sit and cock a snook at them, if I think of them at all, which is rarely! A pretty beetle is so much more interesting, and often has more commonsense, too!

Moreover, and quite without foresight on my part, the price of land has soared. For the one and three-quarter acres at Mamandur, for which I paid about twenty-seven shillings, I have been offered 250 rupees, which is nearly £19. For the twelve acres at Dassampatty, which in 1936 cost £7 15s., I have now three firm offers of 3,000 rupees, nearly £230!

In fact, I have much to thank that Collector for, the one who dined in

style on the verandah of the Nagapatla bungalow that night almost twenty-eight years ago. He must be an old man now. But if he is alive and happens to read these lines, I thank him and offer an unqualified apology for what was, perhaps, churlish behaviour.

But in spite of the boom in land prices, I have not sold any of my camp-sites, and hope never to do so. Each one of them brings back memories of days gone by and incidents never to be forgotten. Each one is situated on the borders of a jungle which has its own particular attraction. I visit them occasionally, if only to revive the memories of days and tigers past, and of Collectors who have gone with them.

Before I digressed, I was telling you how Donald and I had refused old Mudliargiriappa's offer of a room, in favour of spending the night on my camp-site on the fringe of the jungle, near Hogarehalli village. The Patel was aghast. Was I mad? Or perhaps just ignorant or deaf? He had been telling me about a man-eater, and here we were, wanting to sleep on the edge of the jungle!

But we prevailed in the end. Don had brought an unusual asset, rolled up at the back of his car; a small tent, which we pitched on the camp-site. Then we had an early dinner, and for want of something better to do; decided to motor back for six miles till we had crossed the Yemmaydoddi channel three miles from Birur town. There we would leave the car, and then walk up the banks of the channel to the Maddak Lake, ten miles each way. The moon would rise by seven thirty, and the night was clear, and though we had brought our electric torches, there would hardly be any need to use them.

The moon was just rising over the distant coconut groves of Birur when we left the Plymouth at the Yemmaydoddi roadbridge and started up the narrow track beside the channel. The time was seven forty exactly. With slow walking there and back, and allowing for a nap of two hours beside the lake, we should be back at the car in ten hours-just after dawn. It was a beautiful night, and we set out with no misgivings about twenty-mile walk-ahead.

Being summer, there was just a trickle of water in the channel, and the path we followed was dusty and dry: ideal for showing tracks, no doubt, but too dark to see them without our torches. We knew that the first mile or so, as far as a reed-covered tank, was panther-country. Then the jungle became thicker, where panthers were less inclined to go, but where tiger-land started and continued as far as the Maddak Lake.

Of course, without shining our torches to pick up their eyes, it would be too dark to see any animals by moonlight alone, bright as it was,

unless they came right out in front of us. But we were not looking for anything except the man-cater, who we knew would advertise himself if it came to that, without any effort on our part, should he happen to be near.

And so we walked abreast, our torches ready but unlit.

It is always unwise to walk in single-file in man-eater country Two men abreast are comparatively safe from sudden, unexpected attack. Usually the tiger will not charge them in that formation. If he does, he will growl or roar first, to work up his own courage. But two men, in single file, are in great danger - at least, the man behind is. The man-eater will be much bolder; he will spring in silence and without warning. And the man behind will disappear before either he or his companion knows what is happening. However alert they may be, the attack, should it come, will be in complete silence and without warning; before the man behind knows about it, before the man in front can help. The leading man will be fairly safe from attack. It is his companion who takes his life in his hands.

We had covered over three miles when a tiger roared on a low hill across the channel to our right. This was strange, and we stopped. As I have said, it was midsummer, and as a rule tigers do not call at that time of the year.

We listened. It called again, this time very close.

We splashed across the narrow channel, scrambled up the low bank on the other side, and pressed through the undergrowth that bordered the canal, breaking into the more parklike country beyond, extending for perhaps a hundred yards. We would now have to be quick to hide, for otherwise the tiger, approaching from the opposite direction, might see us.

We each got behind the bole of a tree, about forty feet apart; then I called like a tiger, twice, quickly.

We waited expectantly, but nothing happened. Not a sound anywhere; not the faintest crackle of a twig.

It was not advisable to call again. Assuming the tiger had been approaching all the time we had been walking forward, it would now be very close. My first two calls would undoubtedly have aroused its curiosity, but perhaps not its suspicion. A third call would help the animal locate the sound. It would become suspicious and probably disappear completely. Better to wait in patience and let the tiger seek out the mysterious caller.

I had not long to wait. Suddenly, Don's torch beam cut across the moonlight, directed at a spot behind me. I turned quickly to see what it was.

Standing partly behind a bush, and about the same distance from me as Don, was a tiger. Apparently we had miscalculated its distance from us when it had called the second time, or the pace at which it had been moving; it was actually past us and was behind us, nearing the channel, when I had called. The tiger had turned back to investigate and had seen me without seeing Don. I had not heard a thing. How Donald had discovered it, I could not guess.

Now I shone my torch on the tiger too, while neither o neither us made a sound. In the combined beams, the tiger turned bewilderedly from one source of light to the other.

I knew that there were many tigers in this area, not the man-eater alone, and neither of us wanted to shoot the wrong animal. There must have been a telepathic exchange of messages between Donald and me, for although neither spoke nor signalled, at the same moment we both extinguished our torches.

It took a second or two to adjust my eyes to the moonlight again, after the bright glare of the two lights. Then I saw that the tiger was still there. The only way of discovering if he was a man-eater was to put him to the test. So, being slightly the closer to him than Don, I stepped from the concealment of the tree.

The effect on the tiger was dramatic - almost instantaneous. With a loud 'woof! woof!' he turned tail and fled precipitately. Clearly, he was no man-eater, but an extraordinary coward. I was glad neither of us had fired.

‘What happened to you, dad?' Don asked, as he approached. ‘Didn't you hear him? I was wondering when you were going to shine your torch. Then I thought that, perhaps, you had not heard him and he might spring on you, so I put my light on in a hurry’

‘Thanks, Don,' I replied. I didn't hear a thing!’

‘That's bad,' he admonished, gravely. "Your hearing is going. A leaf rustled, and then he brushed against that bush. I heard both sounds clearly. And you say you heard nothing! You had better give up this sort of thing, dad. You're growing old.’

Which just goes to prove how elusive sounds are, or how unreliable are human senses; or both! Perhaps some current of air had carried the sounds away from me. Perhaps my sense of hearing is not what it

was. And as Donald says, I am growing old. But how can I think of giving up my jungle rambles? If Don had not heard it, the tiger would undoubtedly have come closer. Coward that he turned out to be, I am sure he would not have attacked.

We returned to the track and continued our walk towards the Maddak Lake. At one spot, more than a mile further on, the channel bends to avoid a slight rise in the ground. While the track we were following crosses the hillock. We were descending the other side when both of us heard the unmistakable but distant drumming of hooves upon the ground. We stopped to listen. As I have just said, the channel wound around the base of the hillock so that the sound of the flowing water was no longer audible. In the silence of the night we distinctly heard the sound again. The faintly thudding sound of a hoofed animal galloping across the hard earth. The sound continued. This was strange indeed! The rhythm of the beats suggested that the animal was running fast; nevertheless, the drumming went on and on. If the creature was running away, it should have gone beyond hearing. But we could hear it, the sound of a single animal running. But running in the same spot without any progress!

We decided to investigate. Leaving the track, Don and I stepped into the forest on our left, both torches lit as we walked towards the unaccountable sounds, which grew louder. Very soon the mystery was solved, and the solution was as simple as it was strange. A doe had jumped between two saplings that grew out of the ground at a sharp angle, and had been caught in the natural ‘vee’ between the two trunks. The hoof-beats we heard were made by the poor creature as she struggled to free herself, but without success, while her fore and hind feet had dug two holes in the hard earth at either end

We saw that she had been a prisoner for some time, for her flanks, held firmly by the saplings, were raw and bloody, while the bark of the trees was a mass of skin and hair. We saw too that she was fairly heavily pregnant. We stepped behind her; Don held one back leg and I the other, and we raised her hind-quarters high enough to tip he through the 'vee' that had held her for so long. She uttered a goat-like bleat of joy and was gone.

Rejoining the track, we soon met the channel again. Another mile brought us to an old orange estate that years before had been owned by two Englishmen and had been a flourishing concern. Reminiscently, I told Donald of the days - before he was born - when I had come this way one evening, met the two Englishmen and had been invited into their small brick built bungalow for a cup of tea.

One cup had turned into several and they had pressed me to spend the night with them, which I had gladly agreed to do. About sundown, we were sitting on low chairs outside the shack when the hoarse death-scream of a dying animal had come to us from the stream-bed that crossed the path just before it passed the entrance of the orange estate.

I had grabbed my rifle and, followed by my hosts, one of them armed with a shot-gun, went to investigate. At the crossing point we had met a tiger trotting up the bed of the stream, a spotted stag slung across his back, one of its long antlers trailing on the ground. I remembered the scene as if it had been yesterday!

Many hunters deny that tigers can carry their victims away on their backs, especially if they are large. Here was proof, before my very eyes.

Being a killer myself in those days - and it was a shot any child could have taken - I got that tiger.

The Englishmen had no servants, and as the oranges we not in season there were no coolies on the estate at the time.

The three of us carried the stag back to the bungalow and returned to skin the tiger by lantern-light. It had been a very profitable evening.

I passed the estate sadly, glancing at the jungle that had overgrown the orange trees. For the Englishmen had long ago returned to England; the bungalow was crumbling into ruin, and the orange trees, attacked by borer-insects, had died one by one.

We were now more than half-way to the Maddak Lake. The jungle on both sides grew thicker, the trees taller and closer. The moonlight, bright as day in the open, was quite unable to penetrate the dense canopy of branches into the dark colonnades below. The channel, now running parallel to the track, grew narrower and deeper; and except for the thin strip of path ahead, disappearing into the haze of moonlight and shadows, the forest on both sides becomes black and forbidding. We knew that we would have to be very watchful now, for we were approaching one of the areas regularly visited by the man-eater.

Nothing happened, however, and eventually we waded through a stony stream that crossed the track shortly before it reached the high bund of the Maddak Lake. This stream, which should have been dry, or at most only a trickle, was quite unaccountably almost waist-deep, despite the dry season; we had to remove our pants, shoes and socks to cross it.

Finally we climbed the steep stone steps up the high bund to see below us the magnificently wide expanse of water that comprises that huge tank. The moon, from a clear cloudless sky, cast a gleaming silvery track of light across the water that was lost at last in the haze upon the distant shore.

We sat on the bund, as Don brought out half a packet of biscuits that he had crammed into a pocket. A cup of hot tea would, indeed, have been very welcome at that moment. But, alas! We had none. Then we scrambled down the bund to drink water from our hands at the edge of the lake.

Don said he felt sleepy, and so did I. The top of the bund appeared safe enough from the man-eater for a brief nap, so we climbed up again, lay down side by side in the in the bright moonlight, promised to awake one another in an hour or so and fell fast asleep.

We did not awake each other. The man-eater woke us both. Or rather, what he did woke us. For he carried away a man whose screams for help roused us unto simultaneous action!

The point where the water from the lake runs into the channel was about two hundred yards from where we had fallen asleep. At that spot a passage had been cut through the bund and lined with huge stones. On the lakeside, at the entrance to the stone tunnel, was a sluice-gate worked by rusty chains controlling the volume of water passing into the channel. At the far end of the tunnel was a small shed of zinc sheeting built presumably to shelter those who came periodically to operate or inspect the sluice-gate. This shed stood in a grove of giant wild-mango trees. It was a dark spot, even at noonday.

Don and I knew about the little zinc shed. But in all the visits I had made, and he too, to this spot, we had never seen the shed occupied, and for that reason had not troubled to go there on this occasion.

But evidently somebody had been there, or probably sleeping outside, for the screams for help came from that direction. Perhaps the occupant was a bootlegger, which was very likely, as many people had turned the distilling of illicit liquor from the bark of the babul tree into a lucrative profession.

Donald and I dashed towards the place from which screams had come, though they had now stopped, and passing the zinc shed and noticing, saw in the light of our torches as usual, the door was locked. The man, whoever he was must have been mad to sleep outside, unarmed in such a dangerous place, with a man-eater about. In the dense darkness beneath the mango trees we could see nothing. We

halted to listen, but beyond the murmur of the water through the tunnel, there was thing to be heard. He must have screamed very loudly to have wakened us.

We halted and shouted in unison, hoping the man would utter some cry again. But only the rushing of the water was audible. The man-eater had gone and had taken his victim with him. And that made us remember something we had quite overlooked. Perhaps, by his presence, the man had saved one or both of us. If he had not come upon his victim where he did, as likely as not the man-eater might have climbed the bund and seen us at the top. He would certainly have attacked, and, fast asleep as we were, one or both of us would not have been alive at that very moment.

Frantically, we searched with our torches for a trail but could find nothing, for the earth was carpeted with weeds and fallen leaves. Then I thought of inspecting the banks of the channel, where the wet mud at the edges might give a sign.

We looked painstakingly, but there again the vegetation that grew right up to the water's edge hid all traces of the pugmarks we were seeking. There was just nothing we could do, and we would have to wait till morning.

It was difficult to realise that a tragedy had been enacted under our very noses; a human being had been carried away by a man-eater, and we were completely impotent to help.

We went to sleep again on top of the bund, but this time we were careful to take turns to watch, one hour at a time, till the grey light of dawn and the cries of many hundreds of jungle fowl and pea-fowl from all directions told us that it was the time to do something about the tragedy that had occurred in the early hours of the morning.

Searching systematically outwards in widening circles from the little zinc shed, Don was the first to see a speck of blood on a weed some distance away. Calling to me, we joined what was to become one of the most difficult bits of tracking I have ever undertaken. Of course, to an aborigine trail would not doubt have been an open book, but notwithstanding all our experience in the jungle, our civilised eyes have lost keenness for the most minute details that comes naturally to the folk who have lived in the wilds for generations.

Eventually we found the place where the tiger had crossed the channel with the victim. A few small water-plants and tall blades of grass, brushed aside on both banks, which had not yet regained their upright positions, betrayed where the killer had dragged the man across.

Because of the flow of the water, it would have been fruitless to search for blood, and so we followed up the shady bank and through a belt of heavy bamboo jungle that grew beyond the stream.

Here again tracking was very difficult. If you have been in bamboo jungles, you will know that a thick carpet of narrow, fallen, rotting leaves covers the earth in such places, and no tracks or impressions of any kind are visible upon them - not even the huge footprint of the mighty elephant.

Up to this point, the tiger had evidently not relaxed or changed his original hold upon the man he was carrying, hence the blood-trail had been very scanty. The tiger's fangs were fast embedded in the flesh of his victim, sealing the very holes they had made and preventing the free flow of blood.

Our first stroke of luck began when the man-eater a laid his prey down behind a large clump of bamboos, no doubt to take stock of the position and look around to see if he was being followed. When he picked up the man again as resumed his walk, it was by another grip on some other part of his body. We knew this by the fact that the blood trail all of sudden became copious and very distinct. Following it was easy.

The tiger had traversed the bamboos and entered heavy jungle beyond. He now began to climb, following a game trail about a furlong. A nullah, descending from rising ground, crossed the game-trail at this point, and we noticed that the tiger had begun to follow the nullah. Clearly he was hungry and inpatient, and was searching for a secluded place in which to start eating.

We found the spot he had selected for this purpose dramatically. We were ascending the nullah side by side, with great caution, since it was very likely that the man-eater was still asleep near the remains of his meal, if not guarding them. I was on the right and Don to my left, each of us minutely inspecting in advance every bush, every rock, every clump of grass that clothed the sloping banks of the nullah-bed. For a tiger, large as he is, is quite capable of hiding behind any of those things, and if he heard our approach, as he was bound to do, he would as likely as not wait in ambush till we came closer.

Of necessity, our view in this nullah-bed was restricted. It was a comparatively narrow ravine, being perhaps a dozen feet wide at the bottom. From here, the banks sloped upwards quite steeply, and very soon were higher than the level of our heads. This meant that, if the man-eater was still lying with his kill, he would be in front of us somewhere. On the other hand, he must have eaten heartily by now, in

which event, the tiger might very likely have taken up his position atop one or other of the two banks, where he would have the advantage of being able only to guard the remains of his victim on the nullah-bed below, but also to guard against the approach of any enemy from above.

As I have said, these banks were now above our heads and we could not see the tiger if he happened to be hiding on either. Even Don, who is taller than me, could not look over. They were a blind-spot from which we could be attacked at any moment.

Thinking of these things, I felt decidedly afraid and very glad that I had not come alone.

We had gone some distance up the nullah when I noticed a large boulder lying in the very middle. Evidently it had rolled down from the hill to our left. I nudged Don with my elbow and slowed my pace at the same time. Something told me that the man-eater was behind the boulder!

The earth was soft on the nullah-bed. There was a strip of sand down the middle and thick grass at the foot of each bank This made our approach noiseless as we inched forward, side by side, towards the ominous rock. Without looking down, I felt my foot strike something in the grass. It moved: something that could not be a stone, since it was soft and made no sound as I kicked it. Briefly, I glanced down. Staring up at me was a human head!

At last we had found the man-eater's kill, or at least part of it. When I stopped, Don stopped. Then he, too, saw the head! Hastily we looked around. There was blood on the grass, quite a lot of it, but there were no gnawed bones, and no Sign of the usual human fragments that a man-eater always leaves untouched - the hands and legs of his victim.

The explanation was simple, but certainly quite strange. For some reason, the tiger had laid the body down, bitten off the head, and then continued with the rest.

I still felt that we would find what we were searching behind that rock, now not more than fifty yards ahead. But why had the tiger done such an unusual thing? Why had he removed the head? I looked down again at that gruesome object. Gazing up at me was the face of a middle-aged man. The eyes protruded horribly and the lips seemed twisted in what looked like a permanent smirk. But there also appeared something strangely repulsive, undefinably loathsome, about that head, the reason for which did not occur to me for quite a while. For one thing, it was a queer, blotchy black. It seemed puffed and swollen,

and the lips were repulsive! I bent down for a closer look; then I straightened myself, feeling slightly sick.

The thick, twisted, smirking lips were partially eaten away by stores. The man was a leper!

The mystery was explained. No sane being would have attempted to sleep alone at night outside that lonely zinc shed, beneath those dark, tall mango trees, in this tiger-infested country. This poor demented creature, perhaps tortured with pain, shunned by his fellow men, and knowing death was just around the corner, either as a result of the disease or of neglect and starvation, or both, had not cared what happened to him. Yet when he realised he was being carried off by the tiger, he had instinctively cried aloud in terror.

It also perhaps explained why the tiger had bitten off the head. As likely as not, even the man-eater could not tolerate the appearance of those repulsive sores, and the smell that might have come from them. I pointed to the lips, but said nothing, because I felt that the tiger still lurked behind that rock ahead, or somewhere else close by.

Don looked, and I saw the expression of nausea that crossed his countenance. Then I nudged him again, and indicated with a nod of my head that we had better proceed towards the rock.

Very soon we had almost reached it. Rather than split forces and circumvent the rock from two Sides, when we would be in great danger of shooting one another should the tiger suddenly attack, I drew Donald to my side, and we gave the rock as wide a berth as possible, cautiously passing it on the right.

No tiger was there, though my premonition was not entirely unfounded. For this was where the man-eater had settled down to his meal. All that remained of the leper was there: a small part of the chest with the ends of the ribs protruding, the buttocks, the feet and hands.

We looked at the feet and hands: nearly all the fingers had gone and scarcely any toes were left! Now came the problem, and it was a pressing one; what should we do next? There was one outstanding feature about this kill: it had taken place at a lonely spot; the tiger had removed and devoured his victim quite undisturbed; and, provided he had gone to drink water or had lain up at some distant place and was not aware that Don and I had followed him, he would be quite unsuspecting and unfearful of human interference if - or when - he returned.

This would be an enormous advantage. In most cases after a kill, a

man-eater, or even an ordinary tiger for that matter, is so disturbed by the pandemonium created, and so terrified by the crowd of people that comes searching for the victim, that he very often does not return at all, but decamps altogether. But the disadvantages of the situation were these. There was not a single tree to sit upon, and not a single bush to hide behind, while we awaited the man-eater's return. Anticipating that we should get back to the car by morning, we had brought no food or water. If we hoped to ambush the tiger, we would now have to remain where we were the whole day and not attempt to move about, for any movement would betray our presence and nullify the one advantage of surprise that lay in our favour. Finally, when the car did not return to Hogarehalli, old Mudtiargiriappa would think some accident had befallen us. He might, of course, consider the possibility that we had decided to return to Bangalore; but such thoughts, if he ever entertained them, would soon be dispelled when news was brought to him that our motor car was standing by the bridge at the head of the Yemmaydoddi road. Although we had not told him of our intention to take a night walk to the Maddak Lake and back, the discovery of the car at the bridge would show we had gone that way. Thinking perhaps that we had fallen victims to the man-eater ourselves, the old patel would eventually send out a large search-party to trace us. They would succeed as far as the bund of the Maddak Lake, but not being aware of what had transpired there, it was unlikely they would be able to follow us to our present place.

Yet one never knew. The Lambani trackers old Mudliargiri would send out would have sharp eyes. Undoubtedly they would discover our foot-marks and the faint blood-trail across the channel, think one of us had been carried off by the tiger which the other was pursuing, and follow us here, perhaps just in time to spoil everything and alarm the tiger. We could only hope the natural apathy of the villagers would delay the search path for another day.

But we never really had any doubt about what we should do. Neither Don nor I could let this chance of shooting the man-eater slip, particularly when, with such an enormous tract of land as was covered by his movements, we might never get the opportunity again. As it was, it was sheer good luck for us that he had killed the leper just when we were so near. So we determined to stay.

There were two things to do straightaway. The first was to try to discover, by his pug-marks, the direction in which the tiger had gone. Possibly, but by no means assuredly, that might indicate his line of return. The second was to try to find what sort of cover lay above the banks of the nullah we were standing in. I have already told you that

they were too high for us to see over without scrambling upwards, and when we did that, we would have to be very careful the tiger did not see. us, should he happen to be anywhere in the immediate vicinity. Our only hope of success, very very slim though it was, lay in the element of surprise, and we must not lose that at any cost.

The first question was quickly answered. After his meal, pug-marks in the sand in the centre of the nullah, which later disappeared in the grass, revealed that the man-eater had walked diagonally to the left and then leaped up the bank in that direction. This bank, I must tell you, was on the western side as the nullah ran downhill from north to south, from the highlands to the Maddak Lake behind us.

To find the answer to the second question, Don crouched low and I stood on his shoulders, to peer very cautiously over the edge of the western bank. I could not see far. Bushes in the immediate vicinity obscured my view, while dense jungle behind them led upwards to a small hillock. Nothing more was to be seen. We repeated this manoeuvre on the other side, to see what lay beyond the eastern bank, and we found the same thing, nothing but bushes and jungle, though this time there was no hill. The land sloped gently downwards towards the channel we had followed in the night to the Maddak Lake.

Returning to the other side of the rock, where we could not see those horrible, diseased hands and feet, we sat back to back, while we discussed in whispers what to do while we awaited the tigers' return. From this whispered debate two plans evolved. The first, Don's, was a desperate one. The second, rather more cautious was mine.

Don suggested we should sit as we were, on this side of the rock and back to back. The tiger would have to leap down into the nullah to start eating again, and from whatever direction he came, the thud of his landing would betray his arrival, while the moonlight would show him up. That was, of course, assuming he came after sunset.

My own scheme was that we should climb the eastern bank of the nullah and lie on our stomachs behind the nearest bush, side by side, but facing in opposite directions. One of us would overlook the bed of the ravine and the human remains below, and also have a view of the top of the western bank, while the other would guard against any possible attack from the rear, or eastern side.

As I saw it, the tiger was now somewhere towards the west. If we hid on the eastern bank of the nullah, we were safe to the extent that the man-eater would have to spring from the western to the eastern bank, a distance of what looked like fifteen feet, before he reached us.

Alternatively, of course, he would have to spring from the western bank to the bed of the nullah, and then up the eastern bank again, to get at us.

Donald's scheme had one big disadvantage. The man-eater would be able to see us from the top of the western bank, as we sat back to back on the bed of the nullah, while we could not know he was watching us. He might then leap to a point above us before we had any inkling of danger.

My scheme had a disadvantage, too; but of another kind. The pair of us, lying behind a bush up on the eastern bank, would be exposed to clear view by the tiger as he came down the hillock bordering the western bank of the nullah. We could not afford to betray our presence, nor lose the element of Surprise, by setting to work to erect a more elaborate hide on top of the eastern bank; the tiger might be watching from the hil-top and see our movements. In following my scheme, should the tiger see us he might disappear altogether or be might cross the nullah at some point higher up and try to attack us from the rear, although the plan already provided for such an eventuality by our lying in opposite directions.

It came to this: Don's scheme involved a risk of being attacked by surprise, while my plan involved the risk of him seeing us in advance and going away. In such circumstances, anxious as we both were to take advantage of our luck and put an end to a menace that had taken so many lives, which plan should we follow? Obviously Don's; because to face the danger gave us at least an opportunity to bag the miscreant, whatever the cost.

It was a few minutes after nine when we made up our minds. There was no question of returning for food or water, and we knew we should not move about unnecessarily in case the tiger happened to hear or see us. There was also the chance that he might come back at any time. This was unlikely, since tigers only return to their kills for a second feed at night, but in consideration of the loneliness of the whole locality and the entire absence of human beings, it was possible that the man eater might consider it safe enough for him to return before nightfall.

There was also the question why the tiger had not troubled to conceal the few scattered remains of his victim from the vultures; either by hiding them against the rock or in the grass. This was a bad sign, appearing to indicate that he had no intention of returning. On the other hand, he might have gone only for a short time for a drink of water, intending to be back soon, before the vultures put in their

appearance.

This made us realise that there was no time in which to construct any form of hide or cover. Not only would the hide be hopelessly obvious, but quite abortive, because, from his elevated position on top of the western bank the tiger must clearly see us unless, he approached the nullah considerably higher up, and jumped down into it at that point. In that case the rock between us and the remains of the unfortunate leper would serve to conceal us from him.

We took up our positions without further ado, sitting back to back on the soft sand, behind the boulder, our legs folded in front of us and our rifles on our laps. By tacit consent, I faced the eastern bank, thus providing Don with the greater chance of shooting the tiger which was almost certain to arrive from the direction in which he had gone, the west. Don shoots from the left shoulder, while I shoot from the right. He would consequently be in a position to fire more quickly from his left shoulder, and at a sharper angle than I could, should the man-eater suddenly appear round the rock on the left. I would have to make a half-turn to the right before I could see him.

I should have mentioned that this rock was an elongated egg-shaped affair that, untold years before, had rolled down the hill to the west. At a guess, it was about ten feet long by half that in height.

Similarly, if the tiger attacked on the right of the rock, I would have the advantage.

What happened for the next six hours is something I still prefer not to remember. The sun grew hotter, and the sand in which we were sitting became warmer and warmer. Noon approached without a sign from the tiger. Then a vulture, soaring at a great height, discovered the remains and plummeted to earth. We heard the rushing, rattling sound of his swift descent, as the wind tore through those great long pinions. This first bird had evidently taken long to discover the kill, because of its position in the narrow ravine. He had to be immediately overhead to see it; from any other position, the banks of the nullah would completely hide the remains.

After that other vultures followed rapidly. The first bird had not touched the ground when we heard the approach of another, again announced by the air rattling through its wing-feathers. The first to alight was of the most common species the bare-necked, dirty-brown variety. He sat on the eastern bank facing me, and was soon followed by the second arrival, a much bigger bird and of another variety. He was a king vulture, almost black, with a long and naked bright-red neck the size of a turkey-cock and somewhat resembling that bird in general

appearance.

The king-vulture settled within a yard of the earlier arrival and his first action was to stretch out his red neck and peck the brown vulture. The latter bridled, hissed like a snake, partly stretched his wings to take off, but changed his mind and sat with half-opened hooked beak while he continued to hiss and squawk in aggressive warning.

One by one more vultures arrived, and in rather more than an hour there were two rows of them along the banks of the nullah, whence they stared at the scattered remains of the leper, at us, and at each other. A solitary crow, that had come to find out what was afoot, had been cawing loudly to attract reinforcements of his own kind. But none answered him, and so the crow had come to realise he was alone.

With all that, the single crow had more brains than all the vultures put together. He flew down to the bed of the ravine, and the vultures began to follow suit. We knew that if we did not do something about it soon, there would be nothing left of the leper beyond his bones.

So at intervals, Donald or I reached forward, grabbed handful of sand, and threw it past the rock and towards the remains of the man; then the vultures, together with the troublesome crow, would lazily fly back to the tops of the two banks, only to return at regular intervals, still led by the croW.

We knew that the movements made by the vultures flying to and fro the banks of the nullah, would catch the eye of the man-eater at any high place to the west, or even if he should approach from another direction. He would wonder what was disturbing the birds, and would either depart altogether or decide to come closer in order to find an explanation. But there was nothing more we could do about it. If we did not drive the birds away, they would quickly pick every shred of flesh from the bones

Soon the crow became so clever that he brought about his own undoing. It will be remembered that the tiger had bitten off the leper's head and then carried the body behind this rock, about fifty yards away. The crow discovered the head and began picking at it, leading his friends, who were now his rivals, to the spot. It was too far for an attempt to shoo them off without actually rising in order to do so, and so we watched the gallant crow as he tried to fight off the band of great hook-beaked ghouls that gathered around him. Among them, we observed a couple of the smaller variety of white vultures that have yellow heads; they usually frequent the outskirts of towns to feed on garbage, and are rarely seen in the jungle.

The crow went for one of the king-vultures, flew on to its back, and vigorously picked the red neck. The vulture squealed shrilly, flapped its great wings and drew away. Meanwhile a brown vulture started picking at the leper's head. The crow flew on to his back and began to peck his head. But the vulture adopted other tactics. He rolled on the ground, so as to use his sharp claws as well as his great beak. He raked at his small assailant.

The plucky crow disengaged in time to tackle a third Vulture, but by this time about half-a-dozen of the great bare-necked scavengers had gathered around the smaller creature. They realised the crow was their common enemy and that he was alone. Then one vulture stretched out his neck and grabbed a wing. The crow struggled to free himself, but the vulture drew him closer. Then another vulture seized the crow's head in his wicked, hooked beak; there followed a frantic squawking and fluttering of black wings and the gallant crow was dead.

Fighting and hissing among themselves, the vultures pulled the crow apart and then picked out the eyes and flesh from the leper's skull, to leave it in just half-an-hour gleaming whitely in the sunlight.

Meanwhile blue-bottles began to arrive in hordes. They gathered on the leper's remains, and then flew on to our hands faces and lips. With disgust we drove them off, only to have them back again. Visions of contracting leprosy arose in our imaginations. More vultures came, and we had to lean forward more often to throw sand at them, so that big hollows appeared in front of us revealing the amount of sand we had used. And in throwing the sand around the corner, we noticed the ants had arrived, too. Great big black fellows were crawling all over the leper's remains. Added to all this was the burning heat of the sun. The sand around us was becoming almost too hot to touch except where we were actually sitting, and that was hotter than was comfortable. We were hungry, thirsty, and had sweated to a point of near complete dehydration. The situation was hopeless and we began to think of giving up.

Don whispered the very thought, as it came to my own mind. "It's useless, dad; no tiger will return and the ants must have eaten everything."

I glanced at my watch. It showed ten minutes after three o'clock in the afternoon. The worst of our sufferings were over now, and in an hour it would be cooler. Besides, ants don't usually eat very much from kills.

'Let's stick it out,' I whispered back; 'this is a new experience for both of us. Let's see what comes of it. The tiger might return.'

It was indeed a new experience. Later, Don admitted it was his worst. I cannot say quite that, but it was something I never want to undertake again.

As evening drew on, things were not so bad. The heat abated, but the flies and ants remained. The vultures, who had long since picked the skull clean of flesh, had resumed their perches on both banks of the nullah. Every now and again, one would fly down to be driven back by us. Then, as time passed, they began to lose hope of getting anything more to eat, and flapped away in ones and twos. Before six o'clock they were all gone.

By this time the ants, too, had almost gone, although the flies stayed on. In fact, they seemed to have increased in numbers.

There was a rapid fall in temperature while the jungle, that had throbbed in the heat of the day to the monotonous 'Kirr! Kirr! Kirr!' of cicadas, now resounded with a variety of joyful cries as the birds that had been sheltering from the heat all day, emerged to enjoy the cool hour before sunset.

But the remains of the leper were beginning to smell.

‘Ko-el! Ko-el! Ko-el!’ a blackbird screamed, accompanied by his speckled mate; in India he gets his name from the sound of his call. The koel is a member of the cuckoo family. It lays its eggs in crow's nests, and the crows bring up the young koels with their own.

‘Tok! tok! tok!' came a noise from a tree to the west. No, it was not a woodpecker, but a green barbet, a bird of the same family, that makes this sound. A flock of green and blue parakeets flew rapidly across the nullah and up the western hill. Mynas chattered out of sight, while the bulbuls twittered in the lantana on both banks. Somewhere in the valley to the east, a green pigeon softly whistled, 'whee-cee! whee-eee!'. The usual calls of spur-fowl, jungle-fowl and pea-fowl floated on the evening air from the nearby Maddak Lake. There seemed to be hundreds of them, and their chorus was a jungle melody infinitely tuneful to listen to in the evening hour. The sun had long vanished behind the hill to the west, at the summit of which a brain-fever bird was screaming his fevering refrain, rising to a crescendo, swelling, intensifying and aggravating beyond description: Brain-fever! brain-fever! brain-fever!

Now it was getting dark. The stars were kindled one by one, and the sky above, devoid of clouds, was filled with them. Soon it was quite dark. Each of us could see the outline of the top of the bank he faced against a background of starry sky. Everything else was a black void.

‘Kreech-a-kreech! kreech-a-kreech! kreech-a-kreech!’

Startlingly, the chorus of shrill sounds broke out abruptly somewhere in the direction I was facing - a conglomeration of shrill, staccato notes, beginning singly and ending in a screeching din. There was a momentary silence, and another outburst answered the first, this time from the hillock behind me: 'Kreech- a-kreech! kreech-a-kreech! kreech-a-kreech!'

These strange sounds are made by two families of screech owls, a species of small owl that lives in groups, in holes in the boles and branches of old trees. Although just six inches in length, the noise they make can be heard half-a-mile away.

By now the remains of the leper were stinking horribly.

Suddenly, ominously now, we heard again a call from hillock not so far away: 'Brain! brain! brain-fever! brain-fever" brain-fever!!!’

It was the cry of the bird we heard earlier on the same hill. But it was different now. It vibrated with excitement and fear. A bird that never sleeps, by day or night, the little creature was hysterical, his voice breaking the stillness over and over again: Brain-fever! brain-fever!! Brain-fever!!'

‘He's coming, dad!'

I could hear the excitement in Don's faint whisper, while a grateful thought sped through my mind: God bless that brain- fever bird, may he keep awake for many years! For he had told us, as plainly as if in spoken words: Beware! Danger! A tiger is passing!' And the brain-fever bird at night, like the langur monkey watchman, both by day and night, is never wrong.

The lone bird continued his frantic warning, but there were no cries from the other denizens of the jungle, which was strange, because the watchful deer should have scented the carnivore by now.

But at last a jungle-sheep, moving down-wind, barked hoarsely ‘Kharr! kharr! kharr!', and then fell silent as he scampered up the slope. The brain-fever bird was still calling; otherwise all was quiet again. Not even a cricket could be heard as the jungle reacted to the two warnings it had received. I could feel the danger in the very air. A hundred ears were straining, and everywhere eyes were watching for the approach of the dreaded jungle-king.

My nerves were taut to breaking-point, while the blackness of the night appeared to intensify. Even the pale light of the stars did nothing to

break the gloom in the bed of the nullah. The moon had not yet risen. We were alone with the bones of the leper for company.

Then the alarm was taken up on all sides. A sambar stag in the valley bellowed his cry of danger: 'Ponk! awhee-onk! dhank! dhank!" Spotted-deer echoed it from the shores of the Maddak Lake: 'Aiow! aiow! aiow!' The jungle was on the alert.

No doubt the tiger would appear on the western side in a minute or two, the bank which Donald was facing. He was coming down the hill when the brain-fever bird first discovered him and gave the alarm. He must now be very near the nullah.

But I had confidence in my son. I knew I could rely on his hearing and sense of watchfulness. He would not fail in that hour of danger. I thought a prayer and glanced at the silhouette of the eastern bank before me. Everything was solidly black against the slight luminosity of the star-studded sky.

The silhouette ran in a straight line and then, even as I watched, that straight line was straight no longer. At one point, slightly to my left, it seemed to swell and rise. The rising portion broke away from the rest and became like a large ball, balancing on the edge of the nullah.

I then knew that I was looking at the man-eater's head! He had crossed the nullah above us and had crept along the top of the eastern bank while we were awaiting him from the west.

I nudged Don twice hard, with my left elbow, and slowly raised my rifle to my shoulder. Then I pressed the torch-button.

The beam fell on a striped satanic face, hideously split in a snarl, but the tiger did not give me a chance to fire. With a roar he leaped down into the nullah, where the remains of the leper lay scattered, and was lost to view on the other side of the rock.

We were now in great danger. The tiger had three lines of attack; he might leap over the boulder, or he might attack on Don's side, or he might attack on mine.

My torch was still burning as I hastily scrambled on to my cramped knees to hug the rock on my left, lean forward, and peer round the rock to search for the man-eater. But Donald had forestalled me. I perceived another beam there, before mine. A shot rang out, and then another!

There was a grunting roar, followed by a series of harsh gurgling noises. Everything was enveloped in a cloud of dust as the tiger threw

up the sand in his frenzy of pain. I cought a glimpse of him as he somersaulted and came to rest spread- eagled, with his glaring eyes reflecting the beam from my torch. I fired between them, desperately working the under-lever of my 405 to get in a second shot. But from the other side of the rock, there was the louder roar of Don's 470.

The white-red glare of the man-eater's eyes diminished rapidly to a pale green. He still stared back at my light, but I knew that he was dead. We watched for some minutes, but all was over, and I said, 'Well done, Don. You got him nicely.'

The youngster was delighted. He leaned his .470 against the rock and started a dance of joy, around and around. Then he picked up his rifle again, patted it affectionately, and said, 'Good old four-seventy. You never let me down!'

Unseen by him, because I knew he would make fun of me, I glanced at the venerable 405 Winchester still in my hands. I said nothing, but I thought: 'You, too, old timer! You did your bit!'

We were hungry and thirsty, but we knew that if we left the tiger to return to Hogarehalli, by the time we returned the vultures would have picked pelt, flesh and bones clean, long before we could get back. So we walked as far as the waterchannel, drank deeply and returned to the rock, where we tried to fall asleep.

In a little while we were forced to change our place to one rather further up the nullah but within view of the dead tiger. We dared not go too far away, for we knew that the smell from the rotting remains of the leper would attract hyaenas and Jackals later that night. If we fell asleep out of sight of the tiger's carcass, the pelt would have been torn to shreds long before we woke.

We skinned the tiger next morning. Don carried the head and pelt in a bundle on his shoulder, while I carried both the rifles. He was covered with blood by the time we reached the car, but had been whistling all the way.

When old Mudliargiri and the folk at Hogarehalli saw us return with our trophy, and Donald stepped out of the car literally red with the blood that had dripped over his clothing from the tiger's head and skin, they thought he had been mauled and thronged around us in consternation. But when we told them our story, there was great jubilation and dancing.

Several hundred hands, including many belonging to the comely Lambani village girls, hammered Donald on the back in congratulation.

After a wash in the tank, we ate like pigs of the fare which the proud Patel and the grateful villagers unstintingly provided. Then we began to pack up for the return journey.

‘Where are you going?' asked Mudliargiri.

‘Back to Bangalore, of course,’ I replied. "Time's up, and we must be getting back.’

‘Oh no,’ he asserted, 'you shall both be our guests of honour at the big feast tonight.'

Walking into the street, he shouted loudly that we were about to leave them, and called upon the villagers to stop us.

Hogarehalli really turned out after that. Fifty people pushed the car into a cattle-kraal.

‘Now let's see you get away!' the old man exclaimed in mischievous glee, adding, 'the very idea of it!'

We feasted and drank - a little more than coffee that night, let us admit. We eventually left Hogarehalli in great pomp, but rather late the following day.

3 Ghooming by Night and Tracking by Day

We are in an Indian jungle. Night has fallen. The sky directly overhead is entirely hidden by the gently-rustling leaves of the peepul tree beneath which we sit on the short, sparse grass, the blades and stems of which have been burned to a golden-brown by the hot breezes of a waterless summer.

Overhead the peepul leaves flutter and tremble in their thousands as if in torment, moved by the currents of warm air that cross each other or intermingle as they drift down from the lofty Crags of rocky cliff, rising like a bastion to the height of 300 feet barely two miles away, enclosing us in a forbidding half-circle of heavily-timbered valley.

Between this cliff and the edge of the tree above we see the clear sky, purplish-grey in hue, a scintillating mantle apparently in unceasing movement, caused by the twinkling of myriads of stars.

The moon will not rise for another four hours.

Against the bole of the peepul tree glow the embers of our dying camp-fire, flickering feebly now and again between fire are three stones where we kindled it. On either side of the fire laid our bedrolls, while hanging from the tree by varying thicknesses of rope and twine are miscellaneous bags containing the few items of food that we brought from civilization to serve us for the short time we remained in camp. These are not kept on the ground; if they were, hordes of ants would soon claim them. And we have chosen this noble tree, both as a camp-site and a roof over our heads in this dry season, in order to dispense with using the forest lodge over a mile away, or even a tent, the better to enjoy being in the open jungle and as close as possible to nature. Our canteens of water, filled from the undeniably muddy water-hole a furlong away, are grouped together on the ground far from the fire, so that the contents may remain moderately cool. That this idea has proved a partial success is established by the presence of the solitary frog that has discovered our secret and now nestles contentedly between the two cans, perhaps more physically at ease than ourselves.

We have finished an early dinner and have donned khaki shirts and pants, reinforced below the knee by high boots with rubber soles, for it is our intention to spend the four hours of darkness before the moon rises 'ghooming' the jungle with our electric torches, in the hopes of

catching a glimpse or two of some of the animals that abound in the lush valley. The high boots are indispensable in case one of us should tread upon a poisonous snake in the long grass. The many tracks we saw during the daylight hours showed that this remote spot is one of the very few remaining places in Southern India that still abounds in wild life, and our hopes are correspondingly high.

The word 'ghooming' derives from a Hindustani term indicating ‘wandering,’ and, as the word implies, we are about to set out on a long ramble through the forest, shining our powerful five-cell torches in search of the creatures that emerge from shelter with the night.

As we start, you will probably ask me with bated breath, ‘Do you think we will meet a tiger?' And not wishing to raise your hopes too high, I will answer, ‘I am afraid that's unlikely. Tigers are extremely shy, you know, and will see the light from our torches, apart from hearing us, long before we can get anywhere near them. Still, there's always a chance and you may be lucky, so keep your fingers crossed.’

I take the lead, flashing one of the torches. You follow closely behind, the second torch held ready in your left hand, while in your right is a smaller, two-cell affair which you switch on from time to time when we cross difficult terrain, to keep yourself from stumbling in the darkness. To say the least, that would make an unnecessary noise. By mutual consent, we carry no firearms.

We head towards the water-hole that has supplied us with the cloudy liquid we have stored in our canteens, and as we approach it, a half-dozen pin-points of light, in pairs, reflect the questing beams of my torch. They are a vivid green, these lights, and after a moment they dodge jerkily up and down, and sometimes this way and that, to right and left.

These movements are characteristic of the deer-family. We remain motionless. After a while the deer appear to lose interest in my torchlight and break cover to graze in the full radiance of the beam. We look upon a small herd of spotted-deer, one of the most graceful animals of the Indian forest. As far as we can see, there are four hinds, the last being followed by a half- grown fawn. Safely in the rear of his little harem stands the stag that leads the band, a magnificent specimen with graceful symmetrical horns. Even in the artificial light we can see that his coat is very dark, almost black, and on it the white spots stand out sharply. This denotes a fairly old animal, and consequently wily by experience. That was why he keeps to the rear and sends the hinds out before him. If there is danger, one of them would fall a prey to it and give him a chance to escape, thus displaying

two cardinal laws of the jungle, 'every creature for itself', and the survival of the fittest.'

We watch the deer for a while and then pass the water-hole circling the edges with the torch-beam to see if any animal has recently quenched its thirst there. Apparently not, for there are no tell-tale extra-muddy areas along the shallows, nor any fresh tracks by the bank. We are still early and the small herd we passed are possibly the first visitors to approach the pool. Frogs, sitting along the banks, now skitch-skitch-skitch across the surface of the water till they are safe in the centre of the pool.

We go a little further and observe a flat rock to our right. A single bush grows in a fissure running diagonally across it, and from in front of that bush several bright pairs of lights now glow in my torch-beam. The lights are red and they do not waver, dodge or try to conceal themselves. They just stare back at us boldly; apparently cruel lights, unafraid of any intruder.

You are lucky, for almost right away you have seen something that many hunters have not seen in years: a pack of wild-dogs, enjoying the warmth of the rock on which they lie, retaining as it still does the heat of the day-long sunlight to which it has been exposed.

You may wonder why this pack of wild-dogs is so close to the spotted deer and yet has not attacked them. Despite the stillness of the air, they must surely have scented the herd! Then, why have they not given chase, eventually to run one of that peaceful little family down, and tear it to pieces cruelly and devour it alive?

The answer lies in the fact that the night is dark and the moon has not yet risen. Invariably, these merciless hunters refrain from their relentless pursuit on a moonless night. Before the moon shows itself that wily old stag had better lead his family far away. If he does not, these implacable killers will give chase, and when that happens, one of those graceful deer will assuredly not see the light of another day.

The wild-dogs still stare at us resentfully as we pass on our way. I turn the torch, to the rear, over your shoulder. They are still watching! Fortunately, these dogs do not attack men. Courageous beasts, they know no fear; unarmed as we are, we would stand no chance with them if their habits were otherwise. We pass on, and for some distance see nothing beyond an occasional rabbit that we call a 'hare' out here in India. Frequently rats scurry across our path and the flitting shapes of night-jars rise suddenly before us. They seem to spring from the very earth at our feet, sail ahead for a few yards and then settle on the ground to disappear from sight in matchless camouflage, only to

launch themselves into flight again as we reach their roosting-spot. The jungle seems to be alive with them.

Now we are crossing fairly open, park-like country, clothed with grass that is tinder-dry and bushes that have shed their leaves, the better to withstand the waterless, inexorable heat of summer. A blueish flicker of movement arrests our attention. We stop, and I slowly move the torch-beam in a short arc. Yes, there is the movement again. It ceases, and two watery-blue eyes shine back in the rays of light. The animal remains still, looking at us seemingly vacantly. The pale blue eyes never flicker, never move, never alter their expression or angle. For a short time we wonder: what can the creature be?

My backwardly-groping left hand beckons you and we slowly move forward, making what we hope is as little noise in the long grass as possible. But always remember, my friend that the grass is very dry and brittle. What may seem to our Civilised ears as sounds that are hardly audible, to the acute hearing of the creatures of the forest are noises that loudly and unmistakably advertise our presence.

The creature that has been regarding us so steadily suddenly turns broadside-on, and then whisks around to face us again But that quick, obliging movement has revealed his identity and we both see that the owner of those vacant, watery-blue eyes is a hyaena, one of the useful scavengers that nature has provided in these jungles. We see him clearly now as he turns around again; the outline of his upstanding, bat-like ears, the stout neck, the sloping back ending in his weak, ridiculously disproportionate hind-quarters.

He becomes alarmed, and the long mane of hair running down his back rises abruptly like a spined ridge. Then he takes fright! He panics! With a nervous 'afoof!' he wheels and shambles rapidly out of sight. Pitter-patter, pitter-patter! We clearly hear his receding footfalls in the withered grass. From a distance, he calls disdainfully, 'Chee! Cheay!' and is silent.

If you happen to be an American, that parting word would be the equivalent of your own expression, the hell with you! We continue for some distance after that without seeing anything. Then we turn a corner and the beam of my torch falls on a termite hill a few yards off the road to the left, and partly hidden from view by the intervening trunk of a woodapple tree. There is something black standing beside the termite-hill and it is moving. We walk a few feet further in order to clear the obstructing tree, and then notice that the black shape is upright. Again it moves, and the mystery is revealed. A sloth bear is standing erect against the hill. He has made a hole at the top and has

pushed his head inside, where he is busy drawing in the air in gulps and the white-ants with it. Because of this, he has not seen my torch-light.

This is a rare opportunity to watch him, so we sink quietly to our haunches while I keep the torch-beam steadily on the bear. We hear a medley of curious noises – gurgling gasps and a strange humming buzz, interrupted periodically with grunts, snorts and stertorous breathing.

It is clear that Bruin is enjoying himself and that the inmates of the termite hill are having a bad time, when suddenly something seems to warn the sloth bear that all is not well outside. With a great backward heave and a shaking of his body, he withdraws his head, notices the strange glare around him, and, still standing on his hind-feet, wheels around to face us. We see a clod of damp earth still clinging to his nose, and the broad white vee-mark on his chest.

But the bear is far too close to us, and for a moment the situation appears to hang in the balance when he flaps and waves his two paws before him as if shooting us away. Then he gets down on all fours, shakes his head from side to side in an attempt to avoid the torch-light, and begins to move towards us.

Urgently I whisper: 'Shine the big torch! Quickly!'

And none too soon, you respond. Bruin might have charged us in another few seconds, but the second light unnerves him. He turns aside, and with a loud 'woof! woof!' disappears from View. We are lucky, you and I! Things would not have been pleasant for us - had he come any closer!

We carry on and after a while three wild-pigs break cover before us and run across the track to disappear on the other Side. The torch-light does not deter them and they continue on their way. That is one of the peculiar things about wild-pigs. Seldom, indeed, will they face a light. They just keep moving.

The track we are following is fairly well-defined. It dips abruptly to cross a narrow, dry stream when something, apparently from the world's earliest times, rolls from side to side across the path. This something is covered with armour-plating from end to end and is about four feet long. It tapers sharply in front to a narrow, pointed head, while behind it tapers rather more gradually to a broad, armoured tail about eighteen inches long.

This strange creature is a pangolin, seldom seen above the ground; it

lives in a deep burrow from ten to fifteen feet below the surface. It speeds its rolling gait and we see that its feet are turned inwards as it walks.

But it is a slow-moving animal. We run up behind and I kick it with my foot. Then a strange thing happens, as queer as everything else about this creature. The pangolin stops moving and rolls itself up into a tight ball!

We stoop to see it better, and notice that the broad, armour plated tail completely covers and hides the head. Each scale on its back is the size of the palm of your hand. We touch the creature and find that the edges of the scales are sharp, almost as sharp as a knife. The pangolin hisses like a snake!

Pangolins are difficult to keep in captivity. Their natural food is termites, and they have long tongues, eight to ten inches in length, which they employ after the fashion of lizards. The tongue darts out and returns with a termite stuck to its tip. Formidable though it appears, the pangolin is a perfectly harmless, inoffensive animal, being absolutely toothless into the bargain; its only weapons are employed entirely for defence, consisting of the armoured plates behind which it shelters, and the very long, strong claws with which it burrows holes to great depths in the earth.

Unfortunately, the natives consider the pangolin a great delicacy and they are rarely seen above ground, except at night.

We are going downhill now, towards a small rivulet that trickles the length of the valley. Suddenly we see four pairs of green eyes reflecting the torchlight. They behave much as did the spotted-deer or chital we saw earlier, bobbing up and down and from side to side, but these are larger eyes, further from the ground and slightly wider apart.

They are the eyes of the sambar, the biggest of our Indian deer. By bad luck, we never get to see the animals themselves; being far more shy than the chital, they gallop away as soon as they scent us.

The vegetation becomes denser and the trees grow higher in the valley. Because of this, we cannot see far, while the path we are following narrows perceptibly. All at once, as if gazing at us from the very midst of a dense bush, but in reality over the top of it, are two very big eyes that shine brightly blue. They are far apart and stare unflinchingly. We can tell they belong to some huge animal by their size, their height from the ground, and their distance from each other. Their brilliant blue is truly remarkable.

Then the light catches two yellowish objects seeming to form a half-circle high above those wonderful orbs. What can they be? As we look closer, the mystery is solved. The half-circle is formed by the horns of the immense bull bison that confronts us. But there is nothing to fear, for the bison is a quite harmless animal except when wounded or defending his young. Even as we look at him, horns and eyes disappear, there is a violent agitation of the underbrush, and the bison has gone.

The vegetation becomes even thicker and the torch-beam caches only to a few feet ahead. We must be careful now, and not turn corners too quickly; for elephants favour the vicinity of this stream, where grazing and water are plentiful. We can hear the rivulet now, tumbling and rushing between the boulders in its path. You may have noticed that a slight breeze is blowing towards us from the direction of the stream. This will prevent an elephant becoming aware of our approach, and he would in any case not see the torch-light till it fell directly upon him.

No sooner do these unpleasant thoughts occur to us than they materialise. Cautiously we turn a corner, and there, perhaps thirty feet away, an immense bulk stands broadside to the track. A bull elephant! His head is turned towards us and his tusks gleam menacingly white!

To speak now would be fatal, for speech would betray that human beings confront him, and human beings are one of the two living things he hates - the other being a tiger! He may decide at that moment to obliterate us. As it is he cannot see us, for we are behind the light and his sight is weak.

We stand very still, shining the torch beam directly at his head.

His two beady little eyes reflect the glare balefully, forming a pair of blood-red lamps suspended some ten feet above the ground. He strikes the end of his trunk sharply against the earth in alarm, producing a loud, metallic twang, and quickly turns the rest of his body around in our direction. It is touch and go! The moment is critical - a matter of life and death - for it will decide whether he is going to charge us or take himself off. His trunk goes up and he tries ludicrously to bend the front part of it horizontally before his eyes, like a huge hand, to shield them from the bright light. Watch that trunk; also his ears and tail! They will tell you what he has decided to do.

If the trunk curls inwards, tightly towards his mouth, if the ears flatten against the side of his head and his tail sticks out, he is about to charge. It is useless to run, for he will soon overtake us along the narrow path, while the vegetation on either side is like a wall, impenetrable, and leaving no way by which we might side-track and try

to escape by hiding behind a tree.

Moreover, should the torch go out in the confusion of the moment, we will be left in darkness, while the elephant will see us clearly.

These thoughts run through our minds as we realise that the elephant's reaction, which may take place in the next second or two, the product of primeval instincts and not of reason, is going to mean whether we die or not.

The trunk snakes out towards us, there is a blast of air which we can feel even at that distance - warm and sticky and the elephant lets out a piercing scream. We can detect the terror in that single shrill sound as the huge bulk wheels about and crashes impetuously through the mass of vegetation bordering the pathway.

Thereafter there is no sign of the pachyderm - nor sound. Thank God! He turned out to be a coward. Where that great bulk could have got to, so silently, is a mystery.

By mutual and unspoken consent we decide to get out of this death-trap and retrace our footsteps till we are well away from the stream and the heavy belt of vegetation around it. Then we follow another path, slightly wider, that runs on a more or less parallel course.

But we see nothing along this path till we start climbing out of the valley again, by a circuitous route that will take us back to camp by a roundabout way. In the thinner jungle we pass a glade, and about half-way across we observe the bole of a fallen tree lying across the ground a few yards to our left. Peering at us, just above that trunk, are two very bright, sparkling eyes of curious colour. They are reddish-white. They disappear as the animal bobs down again, while we stand to shine the torch at the spot where we last saw them.

A second later, a movement to the extreme right, just where the edge of the circle of light from the torch merges into darkness, catches our attention. I run the beam quickly along the tree-trunk and we are just in time to see the slinking form of a panther vanish in the grass, after successfully eluding us by creeping along behind the fallen tree for its full length.

We reach higher ground and come around in a wide curve towards camp and our friendly peepul tree. We recognise the water-hole we passed when we started our walk three hours ago. But this time it is not deserted.

From the top of the bank at the further end, two very bright, lustrous eyes stare unblinkingly back at us. These eyes have a colour like the

panther's, but they are whitish-red rather than reddish-white. And they are far larger, far brighter, and wider apart. Moreover they are bold and unflinching! Our nerves tremble and the torch beam wavers slightly in my excited grasp. For instinctively we know that at last we are looking at a tiger! But there is nothing to fear and we stand rooted to the spot while I let the torchlight continue to shine upon those remarkable, eyes.

In a few brief moments the tiger steps out from behind the grass where he was waiting for some animal to come to drink at the water-hole, and we are able to see him in all his magnificence, those black stripes on his tawny coat blurring indistinctly into the white of his chest, throat and belly.

He stares back at us for about five minutes. During that time the eyelids scarcely close for a moment to avoid the bright light of the torch.

Then the tiger tires. He walks deliberately down the bank, stoops to drink but thinks better of it. He decides the bright light before him has no business to be there. It might spell danger for him. At the very least, it is inconvenient and annoying. He decides to be gone.

With a leap he is back on top of the bank where we first saw him, then glides over it, to vanish from sight. It is no use lingering; he will not return. In a few minutes we are back at camp. There we light a fire and begin to make hot water for four refreshing cups of tea.

Indeed, you have been exceptionally lucky, having seen more animals than others have seen in a ten-day excursion, and a tiger into the bargain.

An hour later the moon rises and completely changes the scene. Where before total darkness had reigned, the moon now casts a mantle of silver over the jungle, bathing in a soft, translucent glow the hazy details of the towering cliff two miles away, the wavering line of mountains in the distance, and the nearer tree-tops. She carpets the floor of the forest with an exquisitely chequered pattern of light and shadow, of silvery- greyness and frightening blackness, as her rays filter through the canopy of leaves until lost in the thick vegetation beneath.

We roll ourselves up in our blankets, for it is growing chill, and fall asleep.

The sun has just risen when we wake, but we lie wrapped in Our

blankets for a few minutes more while we listen to the chorus of the jungle-cocks, pea-fowl and spur-fowl that comes to us from every direction, together with the chattering and twittering of myriads of smaller birds in the shrubs and bushes just beyond the peepul tree under which we are stretched. There is a great luxury in lingering for a few moments, loitering bed while listening to the songs of a thousand birds. But we must stir ourselves. There is work to be done. Remember, you asked me to teach you something about tracking and still-hunting?

Those are crafts that will take years to learn and practice before acquiring any degree of perfection. Even so, the tracker and still-hunter is never perfect. He is always learning. But there is no reason why you should not acquire at least the rudiments of both. Practice and experience are indispensable.

So, also, is perfect sight. The first thing I want you to do this morning, is to come with me a short distance to the valley over there, where the ground is soft enough to take the impression of your feet. Now walk forward naturally, counting about 200 steps. Then we will go back to where you started, without treading on your tracks. Now follow your trail, not footmark by footmark, but comprehensively, with a sweeping gaze that takes in at once the footprint or two in front, those in the middle distance to about fifty feet ahead, and those in the far distance as well. See what I mean? It sounds easy, but it will take some days of practice before you can acquire it. The idea, of course, is that when you go tacking in the jungle you will be able not only to follow the trail but also to be aware of what is in front of you, and all around you at the same time.

Practise this for several days in succession, and each time look at your earlier tracks. Contrast their appearance with your more recent footmarks; note how they deteriorate as time passes; crumble at the edges, look older. You will be surprised, with a little practice, how fast your eye catches the footprints, not one but several at a time, and travels ahead, seeing them at a distance, while automatically sorting out the new ones from the old.

AS you improve, move to firmer and more difficult ground, with obstacles to be encountered. Never forget to try always to look as far ahead as possible. Tracking implies not only the Dicking out and studying of each footmark and its automatic registration in your mind as to freshness or age, but a general survey of the ground ahead and all around at the same time, while not losing any sudden turn in the trail, or the fact that it has ceased or, maybe, turned back. The tracks should seem to stand out in relief, to advertise themselves from the

general contour of the ground.

The study of your own footprints on firmer ground, and later the footprints of animals, will enable you to differentiate between them and to notice many things. There may be a full impression or a part impression, characterised by the outline of the edge of a hoof, may be. On hard ground, a hoof mark will show as a scrape of lighter colour, while a pugmark will not be visible at all. A galloping hoof-print may scrape against a rock. Then there is the depression of blades and stems of grass and weeds and rotting leaves, made by the weight of the animal that has stepped upon them. These will show the passage of even soft-footed animals like a tiger. If the grass or weeds are still flattened when you look at them, the animal has passed recently. If the grass and weeds have sprung up, a day has gone by. When the broken edges of earth on the rim of the track, and inside it, have dried by evaporation; when there are particles of dirt and sand, sticks, dried leaves, or spiders' webs inside the track itself, it is an old trail. Should the trail lead across water, smudginess of the tracks shows they are recent. If not, they are old.

While traversing the ground, bent or separated heads of grass and weeds caused by the stalks being trodden upon, the brushing or kicking aside of dead leaves and sticks, the Overturning of a stone or a fallen twig, and especially the extent which the moisture on the underside of such stones, leaves and sticks, has dried, give an indication of the age of the trail.

The dew on the ground in early morning also helps reveal the passage of an animal. Even a lightly-built creature stepping delicately through grass, shows its passage by the fact that the grass looks different in colour with the dew brushed off. There is a narrow, darker, winding passage across a lighter background of dewy grass-stems. Here, as with the moisture still remaining on the underside of overturned leaves and stones, is an unmistakable indication of the freshness of the trail.

The colour of a track also helps to betray its age. There is the action of wind, dust, from the air and bushes, the continuous movement of insects, worms, ants and birds, the dryness of the atmosphere, to tell you quite clearly that you are looking at an old trail. Also the excreta and droppings of animals, moist when freshly shed, dry within a few hours.

Learn to study the ground till the tracks almost stand out from it, while remaining aware of what is going on around you. Looking only at the ground and nowhere else, is both useless and dangerous!

While learning this, you must also learn to differentiate between the

tracks of the various animals. In general, bison and deer have pointed hooves, held tightly together, except when running or wounded. Wild pigs have hooves that are always far apart. Hyaenas and wild dogs show the points of the nails on their toes, but never panthers or tigers.

With man's constant aggression, the animals of the forest are becoming more wary everywhere. To help you in tracking and still-hunting it is therefore necessary to know the lie of the land in advance; where the sources of permanent water are, the saltlicks, the direction of the ridges and valleys, the trend of the prevailing winds, the angle of the sun, the gradients, the nature of the soil and vegetation and where the impassable thorn and lantana barriers are to be found. You must know all these things. The ground should be familiar. Then you can anticipate your quarry's movements to a certain degree.

Do not expect to see animals, even the elephant, as you see them in pictures. All you may glimpse of an elephant is a flapping ear, looking more like a bird; the end of its trunk or tail, resembling a snake. A patch of brown, black or white that may look like a stone might be a deer or a tiger.

Be cautious of the direction in which the wind is blowing. Wild animals, excepting the carnivore, have very keen scent and will smell you if you are upwind of them. That will cause them to run away far quicker than sight or sound will do. In elephants, the sense of smell is very highly developed. Therefore, test the breeze by dropping a few blades of grass or grains of sand to see which way they are blown; or test the wind against your cheek or a moistened finger.

Next comes the sense of hearing. Practically every wild animal, including the carnivore, has this faculty to a keen degree. Among deer it is very sharp. So be sure to move always as quietly as possible. Lie down on the ground in the jungle and listen to what sounds you can hear. You seem to be able to hear more that way - the dull impact of human footsteps, the snapping or brushing of leaves against clothing, the swishing sound as twigs fly back after contact with a moving body. The wild animals can differentiate between the breaking of a branch by an elephant, the thud of monkeys jumping from bough to bough, the fainter impact of a springing squirrel, and the crack of a twig made by a human being or the crushing sound of leaves beneath his feet. They know the difference between a clap of thunder, the crash of a fallen tree, the rumble of a contented elephant's stomach as it digests its food, and the roar of a hungry tiger or panther.

But curiosity is sometimes their undoing, particularly as regards deer. They will often rise or stop to discover whence a sound is coming and

what has caused it.

If a man stands or sits absolutely still in the jungle and an animal is unalarmed, the man, provided he is dressed in khal or grey, and not in white, will not be discovered. Probably he is taken for a tree-stump or a stone. This holds true even if the animal is coming towards you. But the slightest movement on your part, especially if the animal is already in a state of alarm will lead him to discover your presence at once. The vision of the antelopes that lie in the plains of India is more highly developed than most other forest-dwelling creatures.

The sense of smell with human beings, so far as the jungle is concerned, is to a large extent atrophied. Our hearing, too, is mediocre. In tracking and still-hunting, it is upon our sight that we must most rely. Rarely can we hope to see the outline of an animal all at once. The varying light in the jungle, concealment by bushes, and many other factors may show just a splash of brown or white, a blur in a bush, a bit of grey or yellow on a ridge or hillside, some patch among trees or logs or rocks, a leg or an ear. The very essence of success in still-hunting lies in seeing the animal before he sees you. Take in everything strange you may see, study and ponder it deeply yet quickly.

The habits of spotted-deer and sambar are largely governed by whim. Often particular herds are found in particular areas. They may feed over a large plot of forest quickly or slowly; they may browse on a particular bush for a long while or just nibble it for a few seconds, depending on the season, whether dry or wet, the vegetation, and especially the danger to them in that locality. After feeding, deer stand about a little while, gambol among themselves, rub their necks and antlers against saplings, wag their tails, and look about. Then they move on, stand still again, and nibble a twig or two. They may loiter the early morning sunshine or shelter in the shade, working towards water after feeding in undisturbed localities, where they become less watchful on full bellies. Finally, they settle down for the day in the shade or in long grass. But always their noses are trembling, their great ears twitching, their eyes alert; smelling, listening and watching for the danger that unceasingly threatens their lives.

There are certain periods of the year when tracking and still-hunting are impracticable. The hot weather, when the floor of the forest is carpeted with dry leaves and the bushes are withered and crackle to the touch, is such a time. To attempt a successful stalk over ground of this nature is out of the question. The leaves will crumble noisily beneath your feet, every twig and bush will rustle, and the earth is far too hard, the grass too dry, to show any tracks. Stay at home on days

when you cannot walk without making a noise and when the ground is baked hard.

Soon after the early rains is a good time for still-hunting. Every track stands out clearly and the jungle has not yet grown too thick with new leaves to make your passage through it almost impassable, and to limit your vision to just a few yards.

Be in the forest just as the morning star begins to pale before the break of day. The beauties of dawn in a jungle bring their own reward. Then consider which way the breeze is blowing. If it is so still that you cannot notice the movement of the leaves and grass, put your whole index finger into your mouth and wet it, then stop and hold it up before you, feel if one side is slightly cooler than the rest.

For walking in the jungle wear only rubber-soled shoes or boots. Avoid scraping against bushes or forcing yourself through thorns. Shift impeding twigs with your hand before you touch them, and ease off the thorns that catch on your clothing. Your passage through the shrub and undergrowth should be silent; not betrayed by swishing and tearing noises. By the same token, avoid treading on dry leaves, dead sticks, loose stone; feel your way with your foot before advancing; just as a tiger does when he stalks his prey.

Learn to walk at a pace slightly slower than that of a bullock-cart, say at about a mile-and-a-half an hour, and as you move do not bend your head to look only at the track you are following, but glance around and take in everything, far and near, and on both sides. All this will come to you in time, though it requires perpetual practice. Do not always expect to see a fully-formed animal before you. You will not. Look instead for unusual patches of light. They may be dark brown or black, light brown, grey or white. Examine what might look like the stump of a tree, a piece of rock, a fallen log, a tangle of undergrowth. Try with your eyes to penetrate the thickets. Look and look carefully; once, twice and even thrice. Look low along the ground, between bushes, in amongst the trees. Look for unusual shapes and colours. It may be some part of an animal you are gazing at-the tip of a horn or a hoof, or an ear or tail. It may be an elephant or a rock; a tiger or a clump of dried grass.

Study the ground also as you go along. Look quickly for tracks and droppings, try to identify and classify them straight away in your mind. What animals have passed, and when? Some tracks, and droppings too, may defy identification. Never mind, remember what they look like. You will learn in time.

Another important lesson to learn is to 'freeze' when you see an animal - literally. No matter in what position you may be at that moment, try to

hold it. The eyes of all wild animals are very alert to detect the slightest movement. Watch the animal. As soon as it looks down or away, you can quickly take a more comfortable posture.

At times you may have to bend in order to move forward; at times you may have to crawl. When looking around a tree trunk or termite hill, or over a ridge, do not show half your body, but peep cautiously around. Take in everything you see; far and near and to the sides. If you are a hunter, beware of the glint of your rifle or gun barrels in the sunlight. Carry the weapon low. If you are on hands and knees, push the gun forward gently along the ground as you advance.

If you see an animal, and it has shown awareness of your presence by disappearing abruptly, halt a moment to reflect. How did you give yourself away? Did he smell you? Did you show yourself, or make too much noise? Whatever the error, you must learn to correct it. Try not to repeat the same mistake.

Sometimes you see things that look like animals at a distance but turn out to be tree-stumps, distorted bushes or even rocks. Do not fire hastily at a long and impossible range or at doubtful objects. Try to investigate them first. Do not worry if you seem to make a fool of yourself. Do not be disheartened by disappointment. If these reverses make you throw in the sponge so soon, perhaps it is just as well, for you would never have mastered the art of tracking or still-hunting. This art is based firmly on perseverance and patience.

There are four cardinal 'dont's'. Don't make a noise; don't advance down-wind; don't have the sun in your eyes; don't move when you see anything. The reasons are obvious and hardly merit comment. With the sun behind you and on the animal, you can see him better. The other way around, he is in the shade and you are visible. Remember, the jungle is not a desert where you see objects on the sky-line against the Setting sun. And when you move, the animal sees you, when you are still, you see him.

Another tip: try no short-cuts. You will get caught in the thorns. Walk around them; you cannot get through them silently.

And listen to the warning cries of birds and animals. The alarm calls of pea-fowl, the the startled cry of a 'did-you-do-it', the excited twittering of smaller birds, the chattering of a band of 'seven-sisters', the strident jangling of a blue jay, the warning calls of langur monkeys and of deer, all these announce plainly that a tiger or panther is passing by. Learn to understand and interpret them. Try to approach quickly to discover the cause of the alarm, but learn to look intently, penetratingly, all around you as you do so. An animal in cover can look out of it better

than you can look into it.

As you progress in jungle lore and the arts of tracking and still-hunting, you will feel justly proud of yourself and happy. A trophy gained this way is a trophy indeed. A trophy gained by poaching in any form is murder. A trophy gained the easy way is no trophy at all!

Talking of trophies brings another thought to mind. When shooting downhill, do not over-shoot your target. Aim rather low on the animal, and do not take too much foresight. The opposite more or less holds good the other way around. When firing uphill, you are apt to fire low. Again, when excited or unsteady from exertion after a sharp run, the tendency is to take too much foresight. Another common cause of shooting high, due to taking too much foresight, is firing directly towards the sun. Instinctively you want to see more foresight - and that more is too much! Bear these things in mind.

Occasionally, in the forest, one comes upon an unusual sight. This rarely happens, but happen it does. For instant, a fight between two animals of the same or different species. Such incidents are instructive to watch if you can overcome an itchy trigger-finger. Try to take a photograph instead. It is a more valuable record, and a permanent one.

Deer in an Indian forest are to be met in varying localities according to their species. The jungle-sheep or muntjac, inhabit thick undergrowth on steep slopes. Sambar are to be found at comparatively high elevations, in jungle-sheep country, and at lower levels, but always there should be some hills about and a lot of trees. Spotted-deer keep to the lower levels almost exclusively. A moving deer, or even one standing still, or all these species and particularly the first, is always difficult to see and invariably most difficult to keep your eye upon. They seem to melt into the surrounding forest and become invisible in the undergrowth, bamboo, logs and twining creepers.

In tracking there is positively no haste. A startled deer, unlike other animals, will keep looking back to see what alarmed it, what enemy is approaching, and when once alarmed will remain nervous for a long time, watching the back-trail. So by hurrying after it you will only make matters worse. Rather than just blundering along, try to learn to look far enough ahead as well as nearby, and bear in mind that your quarry is doing the same thing. And I repeat, make as little noise as you can. Remember always the wind. Approach up-wind, and never down-wind of your quarry unless it is a tiger or panther, which have hardly any sense of smell, and do not forget that the direction of the wind may

suddenly change, too.

Never approach a quarry directly, for that is the surest way of putting it to flight. Say you are on a hill and you see something in the valley below. A direct approach down the hillside is fatal. You show more of yourself going downhill than uphill, you move quicker, cannot take cover, and sometimes cannot stop. For some strange reason, animals in a valley notice more of what moves above them than when on hillsides something moves below. You lose sight of your quarry going downhill, but he still sees and hears you.

So make a flanking, indirect approach, or continue along the hill; then take cover behind the ridge and go down to lower ground on the other side, at one or other end of the valley. But mark well the tree, bush or place where you had last seen your quarry before you start moving away. Once on lower ground, all trees, bushes and places look the same. For this reason, unless one can recognise the particular locality where you spotted the animal, the advantage gained by an elevated position is often lost.

Jungle that is not too dense, of a park-like nature and without too much undergrowth, is a far better proposition. In looking for deer, provided the jungle is not thick, traversing a valley while watching the lower slopes of the encircling hills may at times bring success. Explore the narrower valleys, gullies and pockets that lead into the main one. The wind is generally drawn into such places and will be in your favour. The edge of a low foothill, dividing two valleys, is sometimes a good point, as animals cross this way from one valley to the other. Do not expect to see a complete animal, but search for shades of colour, spots and splashes of light and peculiarly-shaped objects. They may turn into animals later. I cannot overstress this point, even at the risk of gross repetition. Look, and look again. If in doubt wait, stop, look more carefully. If still in doubt, 'sit it out'. If it is an animal, the queer object you see will move, sooner or later; the tree-stump will come to life.

A good point at which to learn how to pick up an animal trail is at a water-hole or salt-lick. Such places afford a picture in tracks of what has come and gone, when it came and in which direction it went, the number that came and what animas are in that jungle. Go all around the water-hole carefully. There is much to learn. Study the tracks. Identify them. Try to think and reason out the age of the different pug-marks and footprints and see and give reasons for your answers. Do not guess blindly, but let there be sound facts to support your conclusions. Try to picture the creatures that made them; their size and sex.

A male tiger or panther leaves larger and rounder pugmarks than a female, particularly as regards the front-paws and the ‘pads' in those imprints.

Sometimes you come across fresh tracks running both ways, and the question arises: which are the more recent and where is the animal now? This is easily settled. If a water-hole or salt-lick is to one side, the animal has been there and returned. Among tracks appearing equally recent, those leading towards bushy ground, rather than to open ground, are generally fresher, as are trails leading away from roads and noisy places, or towards higher ground, or those that straggle the edges of roads and cattle-paths, rather than cross or keep along them.

A very fresh set of tracks may lead into a small valley, hollow or area of thickets. Make a circuit of the area and try to discover if the same tracks lead out in any direction. If you cannot find such a trail, you can be almost sure your quarry is still in the hollow or among the thickets. To follow him in there to flush him out would be stupid. He would be certain to hear you. So try to find some elevated position, such as a boulder, a tree, or a slight rise in the ground. Then 'sit it out' and sit quietly, without moving. Sooner or later your quarry must show himself, and you have him! But should you become impatient and try to hurry matters by approaching him in that underbrush, particularly if the grass is dry, the branches and leaves brittle, you will give yourself away. He will hear you and vanish. Nothing alarms an animal so much as a rustling, Swishing sound coming towards him in the undergrowth. He associates it at once with great danger. As the Chenchus say, ‘When the jungle is too noisy, wait till the deer moves of its own accord.'

If you have to traverse thickets, first push the brambles aside with your hands before you enter them. Preferably, try to follow any available paths that circumvent them. If possible, climb a tree that provides an elevated view. Your quarry may be just the other side. Do not barge through bodily; that is quits quite useless!

Deer are to be found on the middle and lower slopes of the hills, in foothills and ravines, and of course in level forest where available. And that is where you may meet a tiger or panther, for they know the likely places as well as you.

Patience is a virtue you must really learn to cultivate in tracking and still-hunting. Hurry not, but be deliberate. Do not move quickly and jerkily. Do not imagine that, just because you cannot see anything in a particular area of brush, there is nothing there. There may be something - many things - even an elephant standing ominously still behind a sapling. He is almost invisible, then, to the untrained eye.

Early in the morning, sambar generally start climbing into the low foothills - and so also do sloth – bears to shelter for the day. If you should come across a well-used trail made by either of these animals, it is possible to ambush the sambar or the sloth-bear in the morning, provided you take up position on high ground near the trail - between 4.30 and 5 a.m., and catch him as he comes up.

Stalking up to a grazing spotted-deer is difficult, for not only must you observe all the rules, but you must carefully mark the particular bush or spot at which you last saw him. For all bushes seem to look alike and all spots too, and often, after the most painstaking stalk, you find you have lost the direction of your quarry, and your own into the bargain. And never assume too hastily that your quarry is not there, that he has moved off. He may be right behind the next corner - or the next bush! Never risk distant shots at blurred, indistinct half-observed objects. Invariably you will miss hopelessly. Or you may wound the animal and then lose him. That is not sport, it is cruelty! And you may be the cause of starting some tiger or panther on a man-eating career!

At evening, and also early in the morning, it is possible to See all sorts of animals if, instead of just blundering noisily about, you take up a position on a rock, hillside or any rising ground and then remain motionless, watching the surrounding jungle, far and near.

Once, on the slopes of Monkey Hill overlooking Pulibonu in the Chamala Valley in Andhra Pradesh, I sat and watched a tigress sunning herself with three cubs on a great slab of rock a little lower down and only about a hundred yards away. For over half-an-hour, I watched them and they had no idea I was there, because I never moved.

If you do have to move, do so very slowly, so slowly that there is no apparent motion, a quick movement will immediately attract attention and betray your presence.

In stalking an animal, remember this advice. Crawl forward, if you have to, on elbows and toes, taking advantage of every single clump of grass, bush, rock, knoll or tree-stump that will shelter your approach. Push your rifle gently ahead of you before each movement, leave your hat behind and things like binoculars that might make a noise by bumping against the ground. But make very sure of the spot where you have left them, so that you may find them again. Otherwise, you will lose them altogether, and binoculars, if not hats, cost money!

Should your quarry be in sight, keep your eyes on him all the while. The instant he raises his head, stop moving and lie still. Do not let him catch sight of any movement. Take your time about it. Should your

quarry turn his back on you, or be hidden by some obstruction, then and then only is your cue to proceed faster. Crawl more quickly on hands and knees, or shuffle forward in bent stance, but remember, if he looks your way, you must stop and freeze instantly. Freeze in whatever position you are in, and hold it, till your quarry looks away again. Our back may feel like breaking, but do not move while he is looking. Never stand up suddenly for a quick shot.

Sometimes the animal may appear to be frightened when really he is not. So, do not move till he looks down again. If an animal is running from a sound, any further noise made from that same direction will make him run faster But a slight sound, coming from another direction, will halt him in curiosity provided he does not see the cause of that sound or smell the presence of a human being. This is a point to remember if you are out stalking with a friend. An animal fired at in a valley and missed, often stands still in alarm and does not run. This is because the echo of the rifle shot reverberating across the valley so confuses him that he does not know from whence it came.

Inquisitiveness is a well-known habit of the deer tribe, and particularly of antelopes. An old gentleman I know says he used to shoot black-buck on open ground by tying a piece of red cloth to his ankle, stalking a herd as far as he could and then lying prone on his back upon the ground, raising and lowering the leg with the red cloth, up and down from the hip, so that it would become visible to the herd at intervals. He said the black-buck did the rest - by approaching him to discover the cause of this strange happening! I have never tried this myself, and it certainly would not work in a jungle, but it does illustrate my point. Deer are very inquisitive and sometimes stop even when they hear gun-shots.

If the animal starts moving, you will scarcely succeed catching up with him by charging upon him directly from behind. But try shambling forwards quickly in a flanking diagonal direction. If he is coming downhill towards a river, try to get there first.

Cut across a hill to anticipate a deer going around, and run quickly around it if you see him climbing over slowly. Head him off by going to the other end of a valley or patch of scrub into which you have seen him enter. And while doing this, run along the edge of the valley but keep out of sight and remember to be down-wind. It is sometimes easier to secure a shot by getting ahead of the animal or abreast of him, rather than in keeping behind him.

An animal running uphill is likely to stop after a while. On the level he is much less likely to stop. Downhill, he certainly will not. In the same

way, if it is only a noise that has alarmed him, he will slow down eventually. But if he has seen you or smelt you, he invariably goes for good.

As you become more proficient with practice, try not to follow directly upon a trail. Keep just a little to one or other side of it. And whether you are behind, abreast or ahead of your quarry, if he is still in an area of scrub or small valley, sit or lie down and wait patiently for him to come out rather than try to follow him in. He must break cover, sooner or later. At least he will show himself at some opening. Whereas, if you go into such thick stuff, you not only cannot see him, but he will escape at the other end.

If you see an animal well ahead of you, pause of few seconds to find out what it is doing and where it is going, defore you start trying to stalk it. This is worthwhile. It may feeding on a course that will eventually bring it nearer to you, or towards some spot to which you can now proceed in advance and hide. It may have just stopped a while in its walk. Once it moves again, you will know definitely in which direction it is going. Or it may be preparing to lie down for the day, which will give you plenty of time to plan and carefully execute your advance.

In approaching an animal that is lying down, remember it can smell you, hear you and perhaps see you - even just your legs - through the undergrowth, long before you can spot it because you are moving, while the quarry is stationary.

Keep stooping down, to peer beneath the bushes every now and again. You may see something that way.

Finally, and very important, Just as I have told you to listen to the alarm calls and cries of birds and animals to warn you of the presence and whereabouts of game such as tiger and panther, in turn be careful not to alarm birds and animals unnecessarily. For their alarm calls and cries, raised by your presence, will warn the tiger or panther you are after. All carnivore listen carefully to such alarm-cries, knowing what they mean, and are guided by them.

Perhaps you have left camp one morning and forgotten your watch! There is no need to call yourself a so-and-so, and go all the way back for it. The sun is shining brightly, and will show you how to tell the time. If it is forenoon, face the north as nearly as you know where it is, keeping the sun to your right. If it is afternoon, face the other way, as nearly as possible southwards, when again you will have the sun to your right.

Bend your left arm, pointing forwards, horizontally before you at the

elbow, which should touch your navel, palm upwards to the sky, thumb and all fingers close together. In this position, your left forearm should be parallel to the ground, the back of your arm and hand facing the earth.

Now clench your right fist, the four fingers together an inwards, but with your right thumb sticking out and up to fullest extent.

In this position, keeping the right fingers clenched with thumb upwards, bring the base of the right thumb, held vertically upwards, to touch the base of the little finger of the left hand, which with the other fingers and thumb of the left hand are all together, parallel to the ground and with palm upwards.

When you are correctly in position, the back of the right hand with its folded fingers and extended thumb, will face directly towards the sun, whether it is forenoon or afternoon, according to whether you are looking northwards or southwards.

You will now find your erect right thumb casts a shadow across the base of the horizontally-parallel fingers of your left hand. In the forenoon, when this shadow falls on your left index finger, the time is about 8 a.m.; on the left second finger, about 9 a.m.; on the left third finger, about 10 a.m.; on the left little finger, about 11 a.m.; when no shadow is thrown at all, it is about noon. The joints between the four left-hand fingers represent the half-hours between these timings. No shadow at all indicates noon; in the afternoon the shadow on the left little finger, about I pm; the shadow on the left third finger, about 2 pm; the shadow on the left second finger, about 3 pm; the shadow on the left index finger, about 4 pm; the joints between the fingers indicate the half-hours.

One of the aboriginal tribes of the Nilgiri Mountains employs this method of telling the time because they are too poor to buy watches. I can assure you it is an excellent way for I have tried it. And it works!

Now I have told you something about stalking, tracking and still-hunting. The rest is up to you. But take consolation in the thought that the attainment of any degree of proficiency in these things is not the result of some inborn, special gift, possessed by only a few select people. Like so many other things, these are arts, developed by constant practice, together with constant hard work. Ninety per cent perspiration, in fact.

Theory is good, but practice makes perfect. A single day in the field or jungle will teach you more than a hundred books. But at the same time, the theory of these arts and the points I have given you are

important; they are the product of my own considerable practice and experience and will undoubtedly heep you. But in reality you can have only two teachers: the first is the jungle and the second is yourself!

4 The Swami of Valaithothu

Most of know you who read these stories and have been to India will know that the Tamil word swami, signifying to awe of God as the Supreme being of the Universe, is applied to any of the many deities in the Hindu pantheon, and used also to describe a holy or devout man. In its more colloquial use, it is merely a term of respect for a recognised gentleman.

Valaithothu is another word from the same language, and in the context of this story applies to 'a banana plantation'.

But the 'Swami of Valaithothu' was neither god nor man in a banana plantation. He was a tiger that lived in the foothills of the Nilgiri Mountains, and haunted the road, the firelines and the jungle stream that skirted a large grove of bananas just twelve miles from Ootacamund.

His claim to this seemingly inappropriate appellation came about through a chain of rather strange and apparently unconnected circumstances that began almost a decade earlier.

For at that time a sadhu, or fakir, wandered down the road one evening, presented himself at the grass hut in which the owner of the banana plantation was living and demanded shelter. He said that he was on a journey on foot through India that had begun in the 'abode of snow', the Himalayas, and was to end at the southernmost tip of the peninsula. He also said he would stay for a day or two to rest, before climbing the Nilgiris to Ootacamund.

The banana grower, whose name was Kantha, was both honoured and delighted. He thought that this visit from the holy man would bring him and his plantation good luck and fertility. He suggested to the fakir that he should remain a week at least, to rest his weary body, before attempting the ascent of the steep ghat road that lay ahead, and he coaxed his visitor with a large dishful of delicious bananas, spread with thick fresh cream, liberally sprinkled with sugar.

The itinerant holy one enjoyed the fruit and cream so much that he remained not only for the week for which he had been invited, but for many weeks after that. In short, he became a permanent resident and promised the banana-grower his blessings and great productivity if a nice hut were built for him, and the bananas and cream and sugar were made a constant item on his daily menu, to be served fresh, early each morning. The owner agreed for fear of reprisals if he did not, and

the sadhu settled down in his new grass hut to a life of ease, meditation and good fresh fruit and cream.

It did not take long for the few Irila tribesmen, working on the plantation, to observe that the newly-arrived holy man was a queer sort of customer. After cooking and eating his evening meal, he would retire early into his hut, and the faint flickering flame of an oil-lamp, visible through the interlaced Bamboos that formed the walls of his abode, would burn late into the night and sometimes all night long.

On one occasion, after the holy man had been seen to enter, one busybody prompted by curiosity, crept up to the walls and ventured to place a curious eye to an aperture to find out what was going on within. But the hut was empty!

The spy, thereupon presuming that the fakir must have gone out again unnoticed, and hoping to catch him red-handed on his return, hastily made himself scarce among the closely growing stems of the banana plants, and at a safe distance squatted on the ground to await the fakir's coming and see what he could see.

A few minutes passed, and then a tiger roared loudly in the jungle just beyond the sadhu's hut. The watcher started up in terror and turned to beat a hasty retreat to his own quarters. But fear caused him to turn round, half expecting to see the tiger in hot pursuit, crossing the little clearing that separated the bananas from the forest, but to his utter amazement he saw the sadhu walk boldly forth from the very direction where the tiger had been roaring.

Hastening back to the cooly-lines, the spy told his story. What sort of man was this, the Irilas wondered, who consorted with tigers when night had fallen? Thereafter, they noticed that at night a tiger roared in the vicinity of the sadhu's hut, and indeed all around the plantation, very frequently. From the timbre of his call, the animal was obviously a male. Other tigers there were in plenty in the surrounding jungle, both male and female, and their calls could also be heard at infrequent intervals, generally far away.

But this particular beast was clearly a newcomer to the region and appeared to have taken up his abode in the jungle just beyond the limits of the banana-grove. They frequently found his fresh tracks in the morning. They were everywhere: upon and beside the road coming down from Ootacamund, along the banks of the stream, all over the clearing that ran as a rough rectangle around the plantation, separating it from the forest, even in the moist earth among the bananas, and frequently around the fakir's hut.

The tiger called nearly every night, particularly On the occasion of the amavasa, or new moon, and people were afraid to step out of doors once darkness had fallen. But for all evidences of the tiger's close and permanent presence, nobody ever caught a glimpse of him during the day.

The forest was full of coolies at the time; some were engaged in bamboo-felling, some in gathering the ripe fruit of the tamarind trees, and some on road repair work. Apart from the coolies, there were a number of Irila herdsmen quartered a different cattle-patties scattered throughout the area, employed to graze large herds of cattle and buffaloes belonging to rich Badaga landowners at Ootacamund, who had purchased grazing-licences and sent their herds down to the jungle for easy and economical feeding. These coolies were out all day with the animals, grazing them in the luscious spear and bison grasses that everywhere clothed the foothills of the Nilgiris. On all sides they found the huge, saucer-sized pug-marks of the lone male tiger that called so loudly and frequently almost every night, and they lived in daily fear of an attack on their herds which they knew was inevitable at any time in the near future.

But the attack did not come. At least it never came during the hours of daylight, as might have been expected, when the cattle were out in the jungle. For then they were most vulnerable, scattered as they were in the thick mass of shrub, grass, trees and bamboos. Instead, the tiger chose the hard way to take them. He did so at night, when they were supposedly safe in their pens.

The walls of these pens consisted of a close array of wooden stakes, driven in the ground and standing above it to a height of perhaps five feet, reinforced along the outside with bundles of thorns cut from the jungle.

One morning Boodia, one of the Irilas, found a fine, fat, bro milking-cow missing from among the herd entrusted to his care. The wooden palisade was quite intact, but on the soft earth around it were the large pug-marks of the solitary male tiger, showing that he had walked around the stockade, had deliberately selected a place where the stockade was a few inches lower, had jumped over it, killed the cow and jumped back at the same spot, carrying his victim with him. Clear evidence for these assumptions was found at the place inside the stockade where the tiger had killed the cow: her flailing hooves had scored the earth and there was blood on the ground that had seeped from her throat. Also, the top of the stockade had been broken in an outwards direction, when the body of the dead cow had fouled the stakes as the tiger had leaped over with his burden, causing him to

use force to disentangle it and bring it over with him. The deep indentations on the earth outside indicated where the tiger and his victim had finally landed.

No time was lost by Boodia in telling the other herdsmen of what had happened, and that day was a busy one for all the graziers, who devoted all the available hours of daylight to raising the height of the stockades around their respective patties.

This was of course a considerable undertaking, as each pen had no more than two or three Irilas to look after it. One of these had to continue to graze the cattle, while the second man -and perhaps another to help him - cut the new stakes to size, carried them to the stockade, and drove them into the earth within the existing row. There was a lot of quarrelling and argument, because every man preferred the easier job of grazing the herd.

By the time all the pens in the area had been fitted with the new, higher and heavier palisade, the unwelcome tiger that had come to stay had accounted for four more cattle from the various herds, all of which he took by night and in the same way as he had stolen the first. Buffaloes he did not touch, evidently because they were too heavy to be lifted over the wooden fencing.

These activities created a furore among the Irilas, for never in the memory of the oldest among them had any tiger ever behaved in such a fashion. Having lived for generations in the forest, they were familiar with all the ways and habits of the carnivore. Marauding tigers and panthers had every year taken their toll from among the herds, and at very infrequent interval, a man-eater had appeared on the scene. Then terror had been their constant companion till such time as, in one way or another, the reign of the man-eater had been brought to an end. But the tigers that had killed their cattle had all struck during daylight, when the herds had been taken out to graze. The occasional man-eaters had fallen upon their victims along the lonely tracks or when they were gathering jungle fruit, but these attacks had always been launched by day.

Here, however, was a tiger that apparently moved only under cover of darkness. They heard him at all hours of the night, and they saw his pug-marks each morning, but nobody had ever seen him. The five head of cattle that had been lifted over the palisades at night proved his existence to be very real indeed.

Why did he not launch his attacks during the hours of daylight, like any other tiger? And with that came the awful thought; if this tiger ever became a man-eater, their lives would indeed be in peril. His assaults

and his method of removing his victims proved him to be an extremely cunning animal, and quite fearless.

While this was going on, tongues had been wagging. Of course, they only spoke in whispers and after many glances in all directions to ensure there were no listeners. Was the strange sadhu on friendly terms with this wily tiger? Was it possibly he who secretly met the animal and instilled into him the cunning that had led him to prey upon the herds in such an unusual fashion?

Quite soon all the cattle-patties in the area, right up to border of Mysore State, over fifteen miles away, had their the palisades raised to a height averaging ten feet or more, and the herdsmen anxiously waited to see what the lone tiger would do to overcome the problem that now confronted him.

Then something happened that instilled even greater fear into the superstitious minds of the Irilas. About that time a wild bull-elephant had made one or two incursions into the banana-grove, spreading destruction in all directions. Although the shooting of elephants is strictly prohibited, Kantha, the owner of the bananas, decided to make at least an attempt to protect his orchard by firing a handful of miscellaneous lead pieces at the elephants through his old muzzle-loading gun when the beast made its next raid. Being moonlight at the time, he would be able to see the pachyderm and from a safe distance fire a shot to drive it away from his bananas, and possibly deter it from coming back.

Accordingly, Kantha concealed himself among his trees in the far corner of the plantation that the elephant had been raiding, and awaited the coming of the ponderous robber.

But no elephant came that night. Instead, the lone tiger roared nearby, and then roared again. A little later, in the bright light of the moon, a slight movement caught Kantha's eye in the open space separating the boundary of his land from the forest. He stared hard; and there, sure enough, was the stealthy form of a tiger emerging from tangle of undergrowth.

Kantha looked again. There was no doubt about it. Before him, was the slinking form of tiger - the tiger that had just roared - the lone male tiger that had been causing all the mischief and which nobody but himself had seen so far. What an opportunity lay at hand to raise himself sky-high in esteem of the Irilas!

The distance was rather long for a shot with a muzzle loading gun. If only he had a rifle. Nevertheless, taking aim as best he could in the

moonlight and allowing for the movement of the target, the owner of the plantation fired what he hopped would be the shot that would turn him into a hero.

The shot did have far-reaching consequences, but whether it enhanced his reputation or lowered it is a debatable point.

That at least one or two of the irregular bits of lead vomited forth by his old weapon that night found their mark is certain, for the tiger let out a loud roar, followed by what the shocked man later described as an eerie scream, and vanished with a bound. Needless to say, without further ado, Kantha hurried to his hut and secured the door tightly. The next morning, when the owner's son, a lad of about seventeen, brought the usual daily offering of bananas and cream to the sadhu, he was surprised to find the door of the hut closed on the inside. Upon the threshold, and leading to it, were drops of a rusty brown Colour. They had soaked into the earth, but the boy had no difficulty in recognising them as blood!

Timidly, he called to the old hermit. At first there was no answer. Then a faint voice told him to go away. The boy replied, saying he had brought the fruit and cream, and the fakir answered that he was ill and did not want anything to eat that day.

His curiosity aroused, the lad asked if he could be of any help, mentioning that he saw blood on the doorstep and inquiring if the sadhu had been injured. The only reply to was words of fury, 'Get out! Get out!'

Wondering at this strangely cold and ungrateful response to his well-intentioned offer, the boy hastened back to tell his parents.

Fearing the outcome of his shot at the tiger the previous night, Kantha had told no one of what had happened except his wife. Now his son's words caused him to think, and to think hard!

Half-an-hour's intense concentration on the problem resulted in what he considered a clever plan to find out if the grave suspicion dawning in his mind had any basis in fact. He hurried to the fakir's hut, approaching the entrance silently on bare feet. Gently he pushed against it, noting as he did so the dried drops of blood on the ground.

The door was fast secured from within.

Taking a couple of paces to the right, he dropped to his knees and pressed one of his eyes close to what looked like a sufficiently-wide aperture between the interlacing bamboos to permit him to see inside the darkened hut.

Just then a faint noise to his left and above, caused him to look up. The door of the hut had opened. Gazing down on him, with a horrible scowl on his face, stood the mysterious sadhu. His left arm, around the bicep, was roughly bound with cloth, and seeping through at one spot was the rusty-brown stain of dried blood.

Kantha rose guiltily to his feet and stammered: 'I heard from my son that you were ill, most holy one, and came to see if I could be of any assistance. ‘

‘Does that explain why you were peeping into the hut, O liar-who-cannot-lie-properly?' thundered the fakir. Then, ‘Go away, before something unpleasant happens to you,’ he hissed, slamming the door in the astonished Kantha's face

Rising hastily to his feet, the banana-grower beat a quick eeteat, thoughts of black magic and the hermit's dire revenge Springing into his mind.

A week or so later, the lone tiger took his next cow from one of the patties. As I have said, the palisades had been raised so that it was now impossible for any tiger to leap over them into the enclosures, and doubly impossible to leap then back into the forest again, burdened with the weight of a victim.

So the strange tiger did the next obvious thing. He forced his way through at the base of the stakes, by displacing couple of them with his powerful paws. But in this case, he was unable to return with his prey after he had killed it. The tiger was tried to do this, but the carcass became wedged between the stakes and he was forced to abandon it.

Thereafter the tiger became bolder, as the Irilas living in the area became more timid. At this stage in the developments, apparently through complete disregard for the human being with whom he came into contact, and recognising the fear he instilled into them, the tiger changed his tactics. Instead of operating only after nightfall as he had been doing, he was now frequently seen during daylight, walking along one or other bank of the stream or the fire-line that ran close to the plantation. Growing increasingly defiant, he began to pounce upon the herds of cattle that the Irilas drove into the jungle to graze.

The next two stages in this animal's misdemeanours were inevitable. As a rule the herdsmen, who closely associated the lone tiger's existence with that of the swami living at Valaithothu, gave the plantation a very wide berth nor did they attempt to go to the aid of any of their stricken herds during an attack.

But there is always the exception to every rule. The tiger leaped upon a buffalo one day in full view of a herd-boy who was grazing the animals. The buffalo plunged about in an attempt to dislodge his attacker, while the other buffaloes, as buffaloes often do, milled around in confusion, trying to a their stricken companion.

Taking courage from the efforts of his charges, the herd-boy rushed in among them with his staff and poked it directly into the face of the tiger. With a snarl, the tiger left the buffalo and leaped upon the boy, who crumpled to earth with his attacker on top.

Fortunately for him, that gave the other buffaloes the chance they were waiting for, and like a squadron of cavalry they charged the tiger, now fully exposed and within range of their formidable horns. The tiger did not stay to fight. He was off and away, with the line of buffaloes charging in his wake. By their action they had temporarily saved the life of the herd-boy, although, by trampling over him, they had added their own quota to the injuries he had already received from the teeth and claws of the tiger.

All that night the luckless boy lay in the jungle with none to succour him, but his buffaloes kept watch around him against the tiger's return. Next morning a few of the neighbouring herdsmen banded together and started a search. They found the boy at last, but his multiple injuries and the many hours of exposure he had endured exacted their toll. He died before a conveyance could be pressed into service to carry him up the hill to the hospital at Ootacamund.

A long spell of comparative quiet followed before the next tragedy. There had been a lull in the attacks upon the various nerds; in fact, many people thought the tiger had of his own choice moved to some other sector of the forest.

But one morning an Irila saw a pea-hen suddenly launch itself into the air from behind a large tuft of grass bordering the footpath along which he was walking and flap heavily away. His mind immediately associated this action with the presence of nest and possibly a few eggs or even some pea-chickens to eat, and the Irila hastened towards the spot the hen had left.

But the cause of the alarm that had frightened the bird was the lone tiger, and he and the Irila met face to face just beyond the tuft of grass.

For the tiger it was a most annoying surprise, For the Irila, the last one on earth. For no accountable reason, the tiger struck him down and killed him. Then, perhaps a as an after-thought or through mere curiosity, he ate a small portion of the man's chest and gnawed a thigh.

The tiger liked the taste of the flesh and so that day another man-eater came into existence. The consternation that had been growing steadily with the lone tiger's increasing boldness now turned into panic. Idle tongues, driven by fear, had been talking, and the feeling became prevalent that the swami living at Valaithothu was closely connected with the latest incident and with the tiger himself.

As regards the latter, there were divided opinions. A number held that the fakir and the lone tiger that had turned into a man-eater were on very close terms. Others felt that the man and the animal were one and the same; the sadhu being able to take on the form of a tiger whenever he wished. Such an explanation seemed to account for all the mysterious events that had taken place; the coming of the tiger that had coincided with the arrival of the sadhu; the wounding of the animal by Kantha and the drops of blood before the fakir's hut, and the man's blood-stained, bandaged arm; the tiger's frequent call and pug-marks in the vicinity of the fakir's hut; his earlier clever and unusual methods of robbing cattle from the patties and now the killing and partial eating of the Irila.

Incidentally, was it only a coincidence that the Irila who had met with this shocking and apparently quite uncalled-for fate happened to be the very person who had first pried up the fakir and had started the rumours connecting him with the tiger? Surely, the sadhu had his revenge.

It was a few days before the Inlas were able to gather enough courage to visit the swami in a deputation, headed by Kantha, owner of the banana plantation. They prostrated themselves his feet, begged forgiveness, and asked him to beseech his familiar, the tiger, to spare their lives; or, if he happened to be he tiger himself, to kill no more of them. The Irilas suggested that, if human prey were really essential to his diet, there were plenty of Badaga settlements a mile or two higher up the ghat road, or Karumba settlements a bare ten miles to the north, near the border of Mysore State, to appease his appetite.

The swami appeared to listen to the deputation patiently, thought for a while, and then said that, if the Irilas agreed to pay him a trivial stipend of a hundred rupees each month, in addition to a quota of rice, ghee, vegetables and, of course, the bananas, cream and sugar as before, he would consider visiting the Badagas or the Karumbas, or both, in preference to the Irilas.

That settled it, they agreed. Had he not said he would consider transferring his attentions? Without doubt the swami himself was the tiger! But where, and how were they to raise the hundred rupees, the

ghee, the rice and the vegetables? They muttered and whispered among themselves, then attempted to bargain for fifty rupees. The swami was adamant. Silently they stole away; a hundred rupees was too high a price to pay.

Four days later the tiger took another Irila. He was snatched a furlong from his hut; and that, too, at noon. Also, very significantly, he had been one of the members of the deputation.

I admit the preamble to this story has been long; but I wanted to give a clear picture of the simple, superstitious minds of the aboriginal folk who dwell in the Indian jungles, and I thought the best way to do so was to tell the whole story, just as it was told to me beside the camp-fire by the bank of the stream, a mile below where it skirted the Valaithothu grove.

My informant was a short and grizzled old Irila named Boora, who had served me previously when I had visited the area on hunting excursions. The aborigine is usually very reticent to strangers and one has to acquire the knack of getting on with them before they abandon their natural shyness and launch into unrestrained conversation. That knack lies mainly in putting the jungle-man completely at his ease, behaving so naturally that he feels you are quite at home with him. He then reciprocates by becoming at ease himself when, if you are a good talker, you can induce him to tell you many interesting things about the jungle, its animals, his people, the aborigines and their habits, folklore and superstitions.

I well remember that night in the jungle, under a far-spreading mango tree, when Boora told his strange tale. We had heard the twang and crash of giant bamboo stems being torn down by wild elephants. This, and of course the presence of the man-eater, had caused us to light a big fire, and to keep it burning, fed by a large pile of dead logs we had gathered before sunset. It was cold - very cold, despite the leaping flames. We were huddled side by side, Boora feeding the flames every now and then, while I stared steadfastly at the crackling logs on their mound of glowing embers.

A close friend of mine, Martin Satsell, living a Ootacamund, had casually written to me about the tiger and had suggested I visit him first, spend a day at Ooty, and then walk down the twelve miles of ghat road to the banana grove to find out about things for myself. I had done just that and had arrived at the banana grove at about four in the afternoon. Boora, who lived nearby, expressed pleasure at seeing me again after quite a while, and we had decided to spend the night by the

fireside under one of the large wild-mango trees on the banks of the little river. Looking furtively over his shoulder into the inky darkness of the jungle beyond the faint circle of light from the leaping lames of our fire, with bated breath and as if afraid of being overhead, Boora told me the whole story, just as I have told it to you. Then, continuing in Tamil, he ended his narrative thus: ‘Perhaps I should not have told you all this, dorai. It is said that the swami-tiger and the spirit that protects him, as it does every man-eater in a jungle, has ears everywhere and can overhear the faintest of whispers, if not read a man's very thoughts before they are spoken. In that case, the holy one will be angry indeed and my life will surely be forfeit.’

As if in eerie response to his words, at that moment a tiger roared loudly from across the stream and within a distance that I judged to be only a furlong: 'Oo-on-gh! a-oongh! aungh-ha! aungh-ha! ugh! ugh!" Boora stiffened beside me and then trembled like an aspen. The words stuck in his throat as he croaked, 'Dorai, it is he! It is the devil tiger! The swami - the holy one - has overheard me. I am doomed!'

There was a nasty tingling, prickling sensation at the nape of my neck as the short hairs there persisted in standing erect, and I felt the sweat break out all over my body. But putting on a show of nonchalance, I said unconcernedly: ‘Nonsense, Boora, your words are but idle superstition. That was just an ordinary tiger, of flesh and blood. Maybe it was even the man-eater. But certainly no reincarnated or transformed human-being, spirit or devil.’

Involuntarily, I laid my loaded 405 across my knees and picking up my three-cell torch, I shone it into the darkness in the direction of the calls. Paled by the glow of the fire, the circle of light seemed pitiful in all that gloom.

We waited in silence. Sometime later, the tiger called again. This time from the same bank of the stream as ours and from behind us. He had waded across the shallow water and had come around in a half-circle.

I threw another chunk of wood into the flames, wondering if our fuel would last till morning. We had certainly laid in good stock, but with the tiger's near presence we would have to use more firewood than we had anticipated.

There was silence after that second call. Deep, prolonged and uncanny. We began to long for the tiger to roar again. At least, if he did so, we would know his approximate whereabouts. This way, with no sound whatsoever, the beast might be a mile away or behind the nearest bush, a few yards distant.

Stealthy rustlings, inevitable in every forest at night, came to us from beyond the circle of light cast by the feeble flames of our fire, and we conjured up visions of a dreadful man-eater stalking us, creeping ever forward, ever nearer, inch by inch, till he came within striking distance. Then would follow a short spell of agony and afterwards oblivion!

We waited for the sudden but expected charge. Stricken by fear, Boora kept up an almost unintelligible mumble. Now and then I heard the words 'revenge' and 'neither of us will live to see the sun rise'.

This got on my nerves, frayed as they were by the story I had just heard from my companion, closely followed by the tiger's nearby roars, and I almost shouted at the Irila to shut his mouth. But this he evidently could not do, and his incoherent mutterings continued.

A sambar stag bellowed on the stream-bed, 'Whee-onk! oo-onk! dhank! dhank!", a few seconds intervening between each call. He was clearly very agitated and had either seen or smelt the tiger close by.

Miutes later, a bull elephant gave vent to his trumpeting scream of tear, tinged with hate: ‘Tr-i-a-ank! Tr-i-a-a-ank!', and the young elephants in the herd screeched, 'Quink! Qnink! Quink!', like piglets, as each sought shelter under its mother’s ponderous bulk.

The tiger vas walking aound us in a circle. He knew there were men within a few yards, but the light of our fire deterred him from coming closer to investigate.

Then there was a continuing scream of terror, strident and loud, from the direction where the sambar had last called. With all his vigilance, the stag had not been watchful enough. The tiger was killing him!

In the deep silence that fell all around us with the end of the sambar's dying screams, the herd of elephants, tightly bunched together with their calves in the centre for protection Against a sudden charge by the prowling marauder, had evidently melted silently away. There followed a nerve wracking period of tension till midnight, when the rising moon dispersed some of the dense blackness under the huge trees around us that clothed both banks of the stream.

Splotches and splashes of silvery moonlight fell upon the ground and the surrounding foliage as it struggled through the close canopy of branches overhead. The darkness was not so intense now and we could at least see a little. Nor was there any evidence of the tiger, Boora and I became somewhat more composed. But he was in no condition to be entrusted with the responsibility of keeping watch by himself, and so I spent a Sleepless night, the murmur of the water,

burbling and bubbling and rippling over the boulders on the stream-bed lulling me towards a slumber I struggled hard to combat.

The false dawn arrived with the still-lingering moonlight, deceiving a solitary jungle-cock into thinking that daylight was at hand. ‘Wheew! kuck-kya-kya-kuckm!’ he crowed once and then fell silent, as if ashamed of his mistake.

Then came the real dawn, heralded now by his companion in all directions, and he joined lustily in their calls. Indescribably beautiful were those first few minutes of early light. ‘Mi-aow-iao! aio-aow-iao!' screamed the peacocks in the valley beyond. ‘Kuck-khera-wack! kuck-khera-wack!' wrangled the quarrelsome little spur-fowl in the undergrowth ordering the water. A black-and-white dayal bird, sitting on a tree-top, loud and joyously to his mate, huddled on her eggs in a hollow of the trunk; and the bulbuls chirruped and flapped in hundreds while gromandising on the cluster of small black berries that showed between the rough leaves of lantana bushes.

The eastern sky, that had been growing lighter, put on a sea-green tint. This dissolved into layers of many colours as the low clouds on the horizon reflected and refracted the rays of the rising sun. Bewitching tones of violet condensed into a suffusion of deep indigo, white below it a wider band of ethereal blue separated a belt of turquoise green. Just above the serrated line of the jungle trees, some of them partly hidden by the wisps of swirling mist that rose from the damp floor of the jungle, shades of canary yellow melted to a flaming orange and then merged into a band of angry blood red.

This play of many colours lasted only briefly, to fade as suddenly as it had formed, when above the tree-tops arose segment of blazing light-the sun! Another day was born.

I was sleepy, and I was annoyed at having thus carelessly put myself in a position where I could do nothing. But who would have expected to hear so strange a tale? And who would have thought the lone tiger would make himself heard, if not felt, so soon?

Curiously, I was not angry with the tiger; but definitely was angry with myself, and with the sadhu who had so frightened these simple jungle-folk, and I determined as soon as possible to confront the hermit in his own hut.

Brewing a little tea, which I drank while munching the sandwiches my friend Satsell had given me in Ootacamund, I told Boora very clearly that he was a fool to listen to such tales, and that I would soon show what sort of rogue the sadhu was. To that Boora replied in simple

words: "Till this moment, dorai, there was just one of us doomed to be killed by the holy tiger. That was me. Now, after your words, there are two, dorai. The second is you!'

That made me even angrier.

It was just seven in the morning when I stood before the closed door of the fakir's grass hut, Boora shamefacedly behind me, and called loud and aggressively: ‘Open, O holy tiger; that is, if you are awake yet after your night-long ramblings.’

As if he had been expecting my visit, the sadhu flung open the door and stood before me, dressed in a flowing robe of saffron hue, his only ornament a heavy necklace of amber beads, his long and oval face enhanced by his flowing black beard and fierce moustache. His expression displayed intelligence and determination.

In even, pleasant tones the fakir answered: 'As a matter of fact, I have just awakened, my friend. I expected the white man would visit me after hearing the tale told to him by that jackal who now slinks behind you. I saw you both by the fireside on the river-bank last night and was tempted to eat one of you, but the sambar that called did not get away soon enough, and I ate him instead.’

To say the least, I was thunderstruck! The man spoke as if he had played a part in the previous night's drama. I knew, of course, there was a trick somewhere. No man could turn into an animal and then turn back again, although I had heard such things many times from the jungle aborigines; I had also read of similar occurrences in tales from Africa. Here seemed to be the real thing.

I decided to act tough and take the sadhu down a peg or two.

‘Listen, O hypocrite, rogue and liar, dressed in holy robes,’ I began hotly. 'Your silly stories may frighten these simple Irilas, but on me they have no such effect. You are a man of the meanest nature, having repaid the hospitality of these humble, honest folk with lying threats and greedy blackmail. Let me tell you this, O trickster-whose-game-is-up. The tiger that called last night is at least a gentleman; you are nothing but a swine!’

He laughed. "Why is the hunter so angry? Is it because he knows he is helpless?’ hen his mood changed and the handsome features contorted to a scowl. 'Mind your own business, white man, and interfere not in what does not concern you and you do not understand. For if you do, you will pay with your life. I have spoken!"

An almost uncontrollable urge came over me to smite that rascal with

no further delay. I remembered in time that he was regarded as a pious man and such an action would definitely land me in trouble. So instead I said, "Take it for granted that I shall interfere, O teller of lies; and when you become a tiger, see to it that you do not show yourself before the sights of my rifle. For if you do, I promise that you will indeed be a very dead tiger.'

'Or you a very dead hunter,' he rejoined quickly.

Then the fakir slammed the door of the hut in my face. Then I turned on my heels and strode away.

At my side, Boora resignedly pointed out several fresh sets of tiger pug-marks. They were hardly half-a-furlong from the hut I had just left.

I led the way back to the wild-mango tree where we had spent the previous night, opened my bedding, which I had not used and decided to snatch a few hours' sleep. But it was a restless, unrefreshing slumber, disturbed by dreams of a tiger with a sadhu's head.

Shortly after noon I awoke, ate some tinned sardines with the remainder of the stale chappatties I had brought from Ootacamund, and while the hot water for tea was still brewing, sat with my back against the tree to consider the situation.

Although I did not for a moment credit the strange tales that were being told about the sadhu, I had to admit I was confronted by a very curious sequence of events. The sadhu had said he had seen Boora and myself the previous night while he was in the form of a tiger, and would have killed one of us had not the sambar stag got in his way. And a sambar had indeed been killed the night before. I had heard the stag's death-scream with my own ears. How did the old devil know all this? Obviously, he could not have turned into a tiger. No man could. There were only three possible explanations. The first, someone had told him. The second, he had been watching and listening and had seen and heard for himself. Thirdly - and I abandoned the idea as soon as it came to my mind - the tiger had been his informant. That, too, was ridiculous.

Nobody could have told the hermit, for nobody would dare to be afoot in the jungle at night with a man-eating tiger roaring nearby, not to mention the wild elephants. Boora had heard; but Boora had been with me all night.

That left only one solution. The sadhu had been watching us and had heard the dying cry of the sambar. If that was really so, I had to admit he was a brave man. To be hiding in the jungle unarmed, spying on us,

with the man-eater circling the whole scene, did indeed call for nerves of no mean order.

It did not require much thinking on my part to come to what I considered the correct conclusion. It was the only the only commonsense explanation possible. The sadhu was an opportunist, pure and simple; albeit a decidedly clever and courageous one. No doubt, coming to learn from the Irilas that his advent to the locality had been followed by the arrival of a particularly bold tiger, had very astutely decided to link the two events by creating conditions and circumstances that would lead to the opinion that he and the carnivore were on close and familiar terms, thus enhancing his reputation in the area and providing him with free board and lodging for the remainder of his life.

Fate had then played into his hands by bringing about events that brought him into even closer relation with the lone male tiger that had come to stay. The sadhu had either been injured by coincidence when Kantha, the owner of the banana tope, had wounded the tiger, or perhaps had not wounded it or the fakir had somehow come to learn of the shot that had been fired at the tiger, and had deliberately inflicted some slight injury on his own arm, sufficient to draw blood from himself and give birth to the story that he and the tiger were one, and that he could change himself from human to animal form and back again at will. Such a reputation would ensure life-long fear, respect and a status beyond all chance of question or reproach, together of course with all the inevitable material benefits that resulted from such distinction.

Then the tiger had become a man-eater. The sadhu had been clever enough to exploit even this development by levying the payment of a hundred rupees, together with various commodities, as the price of leaving the Irilas in peace. No doubt he anticipated that, if and when the tiger killed more Irilas, such happenings would simply enable him to raise his demands, both in cash and in kind. His future financial prospects at Valaithothu were bright indeed!

It was easy to understand from all this that my arrival the scene represented a serious spoke in the wheel of good fortune that had thus far favoured him and looked like favouring him as long as the man-eater remained in the vicinity. For if I succeeded in killing the man-eater while he remained alive, this would once and for all explode the belief held by the Irilas that he and the carnivore were one and the same. Not only that, but the sadhu could never again hope to create such train of favourable circumstances here or elsewhere. This would be a serious blow to his reputation, and would ultimately affect both his purse and stomach. People would pay him nothing, nor give him food.

Doubtlessly, the banana-grower would lose all fear of him and turn him out of the grass hut he was living in. And where would he ever get such delicious bananas again, spread so thickly with fresh cream and plenty of sugar?

Indeed, everything pointed to the fact that at all costs I would have to be got rid of in some manner. The fakir had no doubt learned from my words that very morning that his threats would not frighten me away. Therefore I could expect that he would resort to more direct action.

If only something could be made to happen to me, what a boon it would be for his reputation! It would soar sky-high, indeed! People all over the district would wonder at the powers of the terrible sadhu, who could turn himself into a man-eating tiger at will, and by whose magic even a white hunter had been eliminated.

I realised that I was faced with two implacable enemies: a man-eating tiger and an unscrupulous human, who would stop at nothing. And I knew that, of the two, the human was by far the more dangerous because he could think. He could rationalise and anticipate my actions, and the Irilas would unwittingly help him by keeping him informed of my movements. The man-eater, on the other hand, had only his instinct and jungle skill to rely upon. He did Dot not have the capacity to reason.

I also knew that, whatever plans might be devised to trap the wily tiger, and incidentally the even more wily sadhu, they would have to be devised and executed entirely by myself, unaided and in secret. I could not afford to take any of the Irilas into my confidence, not even my ally Boora; for although I knew they would be loyal to me, their superstitious fear of the fakir, combined with the inherent long-tongue possessed by all simple village and jungle folk, would cause them to be garrulous at the least opportunity, revealing my doings to their friends. The fakir would, in fact, soon come to learn my plans.

After some thought, I felt it would be the best to begin operations against the man-eater first, regardless of the fakir and what he might do; because, if I succeeded in killing the tiger, the fakir's reputation would automatically fall apart. Finishing the tea I had brewed, with Boora following, I led the way to the nearest patti to buy a couple of buffalo-heifers to tie up as baits for the tiger that night.

That was when I really began to understand the malign influence that was being exerted by the hypocrite in the saffron robe. Doubtless he had already anticipated my move and had taken steps, by preying upon the superstitious fears of the Irilas, to thwart me. For the herdsmen flatly refused to lend, hire or sell a single animal.

I tried hard to explain to them that, after all, my efforts to kill the man-eater were in their own interests and for their safety. They avoided giving me a direct reply to that point when I mentioned it, but countered vaguely by saying that if they rendered any assistance to anybody engaged in attempting to kill the human-in-tiger-form, as they called him, swift vengeance would fall upon them and their herds.

Seeing that further arguments was useless, we visited three more patties in the area, but the herdsmen in each case repeated the same excuse when declining to help in any way. A greybeard at the last of the patties, seeing me turn away in anger, called to his companion and ordered him inside the hut to attend to some trivial task. As soon as the man was out of sight and hearing, the ancient sidled up to me quickly and said, 'Dorai, if you really want live-baits, go to Masinigudi hamlet, five miles along the road, and get them from there, for nobody here dare part with a single animal to help you, although we would like to do so.'

I understood the significance of his words and pretended to leave in a great rage, just as his companion returned. The only possible thing to do was to follow the advice the old man had gone to the trouble of giving me so secretly. But it was too late that day to go to Masinigudi and return before darkness set in. I would have to spend another night in idleness. I had come at a bad time altogether for tiger-hunting, due to the fact that the moon would rise only in the early hours of the morning. To sit on a tree in the darkness without a bait was futile. So, till such time as I could procure some from Masinigudi, there seemed no alternative but to spend another night by the fireside beneath the old mango tree.

This time, Boora and I started early and by dusk had laid in a very substantial stock of firewood, in the form of dead branches and fallen logs, with which to replenish our camp fire and ensure that the flames were kept up until morning.

We lit the fire when the shades of twilight deepened, for the man-eater might already be afoot, and in that uncertain light he could stalk us by creeping under cover of the dark shadows cast by the towering fronds of bamboos, and the tall muthee, Jumlum and wild-mango and tamarind trees that bordered the stream, to within striking distance of where we sat. After that he would pounce, and we knew we could not see him coming.

The calls of the roosting birds on this occasion entirely failed to bring the accustomed Content to my listening ears, for the simple reason that I had not been listening, my attention being divided between

gathering firewood for the hours of darkness and a sense or mortification that the sadhu had outwitted me by compelling me to spend another night of idleness without even a single live-bait to sit over.

‘Chuck; Chuck! Chuck! Chuck! Chuck-ooooo!' The nightjar, invisible now in the darkness, was calling from the further bank of the stream, and many of his kind soon joined in jerky chorus from all directions. It seemed as if a whole company of schoolboys had been let loose in the jungle and were deliberately throwing marbles upon a glass floor, each marble bouncing four times before slithering to rest.

The chorus was interrupted by the harsh scream of a night heron in the distance, followed far closer by the almost-human cry of the 'herd-boy' bird. 'Oooo! Oooo! Oooo!' it called, imitating to perfection the cries of the herdsmen as they drive their cattle to shelter while the sun has yet a long way to go before it sets behind the tall spurs of the Nilgiri Mountains to the west.

The time was approaching eight o'clock when a hushed stillness suddenly fell over the jungle. Even the crickets seemed to stop their pulsating chorus of 'Sizz! Sizz! Sizz!' There There was not a sound. Abysmal silence reigned over everything. The forest appeared empty of life, except for Boora and me. This unaccountable lull acted as a prelude to an even that was as unnerving and unexpected as any I have ever experienced. For suddenly the tiger moaned three times in the darkness somewhere by the stream to the south of us. 'Oo-on-g h! O-o o-o ongh! A-oongh!’

Silence again, but for barely a minute. Then from the west of us in the direction in which the road from Ootacamund led to Masinigudi, came an unearthly cacophony of sound, not loud, but clear; 'Aaa-ha-ha-ha-ha! Aaa-ha-ha-ha-ha! Aaa- ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Boora, beside me, literally shrank with terror, while the eerie noise caused the tingling sensation of fright to race across my scalp. Then the spell was broken. Grabbing my torch and rifle, I leapt to my feet and raced towards that unearthly din. Gone were all thoughts of the supernatural. Common-sense had asserted itself as I realised that the sadhu had blundered badly by giving himself away. For the tiger that had just been calling from across the river could not have covered the distance to the road direction in so short a time.

The fakir was trying to frighten me. No sooner had the tiger called than he had given vent to that raucous laughter to make us think the carnivore had already changed to human form. He had given himself away, and I intended to catch him redhanded.

Following the wavering beam of my torch, I dashed along the narrow footpath that soon led to the roadway. There I turned to my left, and pelted towards the banana-tope and incidentally the fakir's hut, only a short distance away, hoping to overtake the rascal before he could reach it.

But evidently the fakir could run far faster than myself, for I eventually arrived at the hut, which was in utter darkness, without a glimpse of him. I tried to wrench the closed door open. It resisted my efforts and I banged with the flat of my hand against the surface of closely-spliced bamboo.

After an irritating delay, I saw through the gaps in the bamboo the flicker of lamp within. The light approached and halted, and there passed a few moments during which, presumably, the fastenings were being the undone. Then the door flew open, and before me stood, hermit. This time, no saffron robe adorned him. He was naked but for a brief loin cloth and the string of large beads that dangled from his neck.

I shone the beam of my torch directly in his face.

Never for a moment did he close his eyes to avoid the light but his lips curled in a derisive smile as he rasped: ‘The man can still run well for his age, but did he think it possible to catch the tiger's spirit when it laughed at him?’

Exerting a tremendous effort to control myself, I replied, ‘You run still faster for an even older man. But beware, O trickster, the man-eater does not one day decide to end this farce by eating you.’

Before he could reply, I swung around to walk away and bumped into old Boora who, unknown to me and afraid being left alone, had followed hot-foot in my steps. Without a word and in deep chagrin, I walked back to our camp-fire, my attendant close behind me. No thoughts of the man-eater entered my mind; only vexation at the ignominious way in which the sadhu had again made a monkey out of me.

We spent another sleepless night, during which nothing happened, and in spite of our tiredness set out for Masinigudi just after sunrise with the avowed intention of purchasing three live-baits, which I intended to tie up for the tiger.

With some considerable difficulty, and of course a great deal of bargaining and bartering, I managed to procure two young buffaloes and a half-grown brown bull, which we led back to our camp-site with the minimum of delay. It was then one o'clock in the afternoon and I

felt very, very tired after the two sleepless nights we had already been through. To keep awake for another night would be impossible and so, indifferent to the man-eater's possible proximity, we tethered our three animals at the base of the old mango-tree and fell asleep amongst them.

I awoke at exactly four o'clock. The short three hours of slumber had nevertheless dispelled the sense of numbed exhaustion that had been creeping over me, and I determined, with only two and a half hours of daylight left in which to make some sort of preparations to try to meet the tiger on equal terms that night.

Now I want you to follow me carefully for a little while in order to understand clearly the lie of the land, for that has a very important bearing on what transpired subsequently. The main range of the Nilgiri Mountains lay to the south of us, but a spur, in the form of a lower line of hills, jutted out to the west. At the base of this spur, and parallel to it, was the road from Ootacamund, leading from south to north, towards Masinigudi. Then came a strip of scrub jungle, varying in width from a few hundred yards in some places to a mile, separating the road from the stream which zig-zagged along from the foot of the main range of the Nilgiris to its confluence with the Moyar River over ten miles away to the north-east. All along and beyond the river was dense jungle. The Valaithothu plantation was at the base of the main Nilgiri range and adjacent to the river, and as I have said the man-eater appeared to have his home somewhere in this vicinity. That was common talk, confirmed by the fact that on the two previous nights, his first roars had come from this direction.

Therefore, if I tied my baits in such a fashion that one of them was within sight of the road shortly after it had passed the banana-grove, the second within sight of the river bank and to the east of the road and my first bait, and the third at base of the low spur of hills that ran parallel to the road on the west, from whatever direction the tiger approached, he would be bound to blunder into one or the other.

The only mistake in this plan was that, as matters stood just then, there was insufficient time for me to tie out more than one bait that night and to build more than a single machan before the sun set. Consequently, I would without delay have to make a selection from one of these three positions and build a hasty machan nearby. The other two animals I would ask Boora to take back with him and tether outside his home that night, till we could make use of them the following day.

Now came the question: which was the most promising place to tie the

baits? For the last two nights the tiger had called by the riverside. As a hunter, he was not likely to use the same approach for three consecutive nights. This time he would in all probability come either along the road, which would also bring him near the sadhu's hut, or he would approach from further west, in the direction of the parallel spur of hills.

I remembered that, the morning of the previous day, Boora and I had seen the tiger's pugs about half a furlong from the fakir's hut. The previous night he had not come that way.

All the above facts, taken together, seemed to indicate that in every likelihood the tiger would approach from the west that night. Of course, there was absolutely no certainty of this, for he might just as well come along the road near the sadhu's hut. It was purely a gambler's chance, backed by a modicum of reason, but my best bet seemed to be to tie to the west, at the foot of the spur of hills.

Making my mind up quickly, I joined Boora in driving a three baits to his hut, a mud-and-wattle affair situated in a small hamlet of half-a-dozen similar huts within two furlong of the banana plantation. Here we left the two buffalo-heifer and, selecting the brown bull-calf as the animal most likely to entice the tiger, drove it between us to the base of the foothills in the west which, at that spot, was a little less than a mile distant.

We reached our objective, a nullah that I knew ran down the hillside and turned eastwards to join the river we had just left. Clambering down to the bed of this nullah, which was dry and nowhere more than ten feet deep, we found many pug-marks of the lone tiger clearly visible in the soft sand. But not one of them was less than four to five days old. These tracks led in both directions, proving that the nullah was a favourite route, followed by the man-eater on his hunting-trips in search of animal victims, and these signs made me feel more optimistic about him choosing the nullah that night.

On the top of one of the banks of this ravine grew what is familiarly known as an 'Indian-0ak' tree. It has large leaves, growing in pairs, with clusters of flat bean-like seeds, and is a favourable tree for tying a machan, as it has no thorns but does have a rough bark that enables the ropes that hold the machan to grip firmly. We decided to tie the bull-calf about fifteen feet from the base of this tree, but near the edge of the ravine, so as to be clearly visible to any tiger either walking down the nullah-bed, ten feet below, or stalking along the top.

Having, as I have already said, large leaves, there was no necessity for much elaborate camouflaging for the machan which was readily -

and very luckily - supplied by a convenient fork about ten feet off the ground, where the three main branches of the tree bifurcated from the trunk. A little filling up of the hollow where these branches separated with fresh leaves that would not rustle should I move, together with a few fronds and tendrils of the large leaves plucked from the higher up of boughs of the tree and woven in between the three jutting limbs formed a hurried although far-from-perfect machan.

But by this times it was gone half-past five and we could delay no longer. For one thing, Boora had to make his way back to the Settlement unarmed and alone. Secondly, even at of that moment, should be he lying up anywhere along the spur of hills to the west, from his elevated position the tiger would be able to see us clearly moving about near the tree. If he did, it might have two quite opposite effects. Should he be daring enough, as he certainly appeared to be, he would make straight for the spot to see if it was possible for him to find human tit-bit for dinner. On the other hand, should he have the inherent cowardice and deep suspicion common to practically erery man-eater, he would give the place a very wide berth and not come anywhere near it that night or for several nights thereafter.

Boora tied the brown bull to a convenient stump within thirty feet from where I was crouched, performed the usual farewell salutation, asking its pardon for the part he was playing in bringing about its death by prostrating himself before the animal and touching the earth thrice with his forehead, and then hastily went his way.

The sun had long disappeared behind the intervening hills to the west, and the shades of evening began to fall by six o'clock. I sat facing the hills as being the most likely direction from which the tiger would appear. Behind me, from the bed of the river, an elephant trumpeted mildly, no doubt enjoying his early evening bath. Unafraid of this huge but to them quite harmless companion, the jungle-fowl, spur-fowl and pea-fowl kept up a recurrent chorus of calls from the aisles of bamboo that grew in profusion on the further bank of the stream. Up above me, on the hillside immediately in front, a troup of black-faced, longtailed langur monkeys romped and gambolled in the sheer joy of living.

‘Whoomp! Whoomp! Whoomp!' The slopes echoed and re-echoed to the joyous cry of the males, interspersed occasionally and faintly, now and then, with a sharper, more timid, 'Cheek! Cheek! Cheek!’ from the females and young.

How I envied those monkeys at that moment! To them, life was from all play, with no responsibilities. In faith they capered from tree-top to tree-top, regardless of their ever-watchful enemies, possible panther or

tiger lurking below, relying on the sharp eyes and alert senses of their sentinel, the solitary langur watchman, posted by them at the summit of the tallest tree, watchful for the slightest suspicious movement on the floor of the jungle below -the deeper shadow that might betray a furtive prowler - or the faintest crackle of bramble or brush that would betoken the stealthy footsteps of a spotted or striped killer.

And it was that very langur watchman who gave the first alarm before the sun had even set. Floating across the cooling air came his harsh, harrowing, warning call: ‘Ha-aah! Harr! Harr!.. Ha-aah! Harr! Harr!’

That monkey-watchman did a magnificent job, for he not only alerted his troupe of monkeys, who ceased their romping at once, but he sent the spotted-deer, grazing in the valley, helter skelter for shelter with sharp cries of 'Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!

And he alerted me. I knew the man-eater was coming, and I hugged myself with pleasure at having reasoned out his line of approach correctly.

Or so I thought!

For the tiger confirmed his presence. ‘A-0ongh! Aungh-ha! Aungh-ha!' he moaned from the hillside facing me.

But he did not turn up, and after fifteen minutes of hysterical harr-harring, the langur-watchman fell silent and the spotted-deer ceased their sharp cries. Darkness was falling rapidly, and while sitting perfectly still, I strained my eyes by starting into the gathering gloom, expecting at any moment to detect the form of the tiger slinking down the nullah.

Within a few minutes an animal did hasten down the ravine with urgent, rolling gait, but it was only a sloth-bear, so intent upon reaching the fallen, ripened boram fruit in the scrub-jungle to the east that he never for a moment thought about the tiger, and certainly did not notice me perched the Indian-oak tree.

Then night fell. The air in the whole valley where I sat heated by the day-long sunshine, began to rise, and the cold air from the mountains rushed down to fill the vacuum. It grew bitterly cold. I became numb and uncomfortable, and I had difficulty in keeping my teeth from chattering. Suddenly, I sensed a faint movement behind me. Yes, there it was again! Distinctly I felt the touch of tiny, fairy-like finger above my elbow and then on my neck. The thing, whatever it was, was perched on my shoulder!

Quickly I jerked my head around to see what sort of elfin visitor had

thought fit to touch me. A pair of large, soulful eyes gazed into mine from a tiny head hardly two inches across. A miniature human-like body, not much more than six inches tall but with disproportionately long arms and legs, was sitting comfortably on my shoulder.

But my new companion turned out to be no fairly, come to warn me of impending danger; he was only a 'slender lorris', a delicate monkey-like animal, entirely nocturnal in its habits, that lives in the jungles and waste-lands of Southern India.

Incidentally, these unfortunate little creatures are much persecuted by certain ignorant aborigines, who believe their large and lustreful eyes have wonderful properties to cure venereal complaints. The poor beasts are caught and their eyes are then gouged out while they are still alive. Afterwards, they are killed and eaten as a further part of the remedy. But to be really efficacious, the jungle-men believe the eyes must be pulled out while the animal is still living. Truly some of the unfortunate creatures of the forest suffer greatly a at the hands of men!

The lorris took fright when I moved my head. Quickly it clambered up one of the branches at my side and disappeared. Minutes later, when the little lorris found that it had not succeeded in escaping from danger, it decided to voice its screeching alarm call. ‘Keee-eee-eee! Keee-eee-cee!' came the sound from the tree-top above. The tiny monkey was really worried: he had climbed up the tree only to discover he could not escape without climbing down and passing over me again.

The hours dragged slowly by in that extraordinarily silent night. Except for the soughing of the sharp gusts of chill wind blowing down from the mountains, the forest appeared to be bereft of most forms of life. Periodically, a wood-cricket chirruped from somewhere in the ravine, and once a bull-bison whistled a furlong or more to my rear, as a puff of breeze carried my human scent to his keen nostrils.

The sky was cloudless, spangled with a million stars, a sight to experience and remember, defying description by pen or tongue. The combined light of the heavenly bodies dispelled the darkness and shed a faint glow over the vista of jungle and hillside around and above me.

At long last the silence was shattered by a discordant medley of sounds from the lower ground leading to the valley behind, through while the river meandered; 'Oooo-ooh! Wooo- 0oh! Oo-where? Oo-where? Here! Heere! Hee-yay! Heee-yah! Yah! Yah!'

It was the cry of a jackal pack, furtively searching for such food as they could find, The leader voiced his weird call, and the other jackals echoed it as they trailed along behind.

Then, in mid-cry, the pack broke off short at the very climax of one of their choruses. Not a whimper, not a sound followed. Why was that? I began to wonder.

The reason came in another five seconds, the sound floating from behind me from the very direction where, but a moment before, the jackals had been in full cry.

'Ugh-ha! Oo-ooongh! Aa-oongh!'

The tiger had come down the hillside and passed my position on the broad-leafed, Indian-oak tree. From his roars, he was now probably on or near the road, and close to the banana grove.... And near the sadhu's hut!

I regretted that lack of time had prevented me from tying one of the buffalo-calves in the vicinity of the road, as I had originally intended. That was when a perfectly insane notion entered my head. Why it did so bears no justification whatever. It just did.

Now that the tiger was calling near the fakir's hut, I felt impelled to get down from my tree and hurry there as quickly as I could. Maybe I was beginning to half-believe old Boora's weird story and wanted to see for myself whether the sadhu was at home or not. The tiger was still calling as I scrambled down the tree and jog-trotted towards the hut. It was less than a mile away, but so long as I could hear the tiger's roars, I knew I was safe from a sudden ambush. A segment of moon had arisen about an hour earlier, and by its light, although poor, I was able to retrace my steps along the footpath I had followed that evening on my way to the nullah.

I reached the hut from the west as the man-eater roared somewhere near the roadway to the east. The hut was in darkness.

Was the fakir inside? Creeping up to it, I placed my ear to the wall of plaited bamboo, endeavouring to catch sound from within. But nothing could I hear. No breathing as of a man in deep slumber. The hut appeared to be empty.

That was when the tiger roared once more. He was very near now. In all probability walking along the roadway, hidden by the closely-growing banana trees, less than a furlong to the east.

For the second time that night, an idea came to me on the spur of the moment, and without waiting to consider its merits, I acted.

Filling my lungs with air, and cupping my hands over my mouth, I answered the tiger, imitating his call in a manner I had practised under

the able tuition of my old friend and instructor, Byra the Poojaree.

‘A-a-aungh! A-a-a-aungh! O-0-0-ongh!' I called deeply.

Then I remained silent, crouching behind the corner of the bamboo hut, rifle half-lifted to my shoulder, with the ball of my left thumb lightly touching the button-switch controlling the three-cell electric torch clamped to the barrel of my trusty .405. The tiger never roared again. He just walked straight towards the sound he had heard. I knew he was coming all right.

A deep silence fell all around. It was an oppressive silence that could almost be felt, and a strange unaccountable sense of foreboding began to creep over me. Why this should happen I could not tell, for I was safe enough in my position around the corner of the swami's hut. The moonlight shone down palely upon the jungle around me, just strong enough to make things visible without making them clear.

It might have been a minute or two later when the unexpected happened. A human figure broke cover from duster of banana trees, in exactly the direction from which the tiger had been calling, and came running towards me.

It was a man, and he at first appeared to be stark-naked until, upon closer approach, I could see that he was wearing a dark loincloth.

Then I realised that the man was not running towards me, but towards the hut, for I would be quite invisible to him from where I was as hiding, around the corner. And the man was the fakir himself!

My breath caught as I grasped the significance of what was happening before my very eyes. Hardly a few minutes earlier, I had heard a tiger roar by the roadside. Now here was the fakir, coming from the very spot where the tiger had been calling!

I was true, then! I was witnessing a scene as bizarre and strange as any man could have seen with his own eyes. But the very next moment, the mystery was rudely shattered and the black magic gone!

For, with a series of short roars, the tiger charged from behind the fleeing figure, and in two bounds caught up with him. The unfortunate man's shriek sounds in my ears to this day: ‘Ai-yo-ooo-ooo-ooo!' he screamed, and that was all.

As the man-eater leapt upon him, tiger and man disappeared from sight in the long grass in the pale moonlight. The unexpectedness of everything had rooted me to the spot. Now the spell was broken, and with a loud yell, I ran forward as fast as I could run. Perhaps I might yet

be in time to save the swami, perhaps my shout might frighten the tiger away. I had hardly forty yards to go. I pressed the button of my torch as I ran, but it was only from a distance of fifteen yards that the beam fell upon the tiger's glaring eyes as he crouched over his prostrate victim in the long grass.

Without thinking, I stopped abruptly in my tracks and fired between those terrible eyes. The tiger half-rose, and I fire again and yet again into that murderous head. He collapsed, and a great quivering, as if from a terrible ague, shook his whole frame.

Only then did I realise that the man-eater had fallen on the top of his victim and practically hid him from view. More terrible still, any of my three high-velocity bullets fired at that short range, might have gone through the tiger, or even missed him and entered the prostrate fakir below.

I went up to the tiger, still twitching spasmodically, sat on haunches and fired a fourth shot from a distance of two yards into the back of his skull, already shattered by my earlier bullets. It was another minute before the twitching ceased. Then, with some difficulty, I pulled the dead tiger off the man on whom he was lying. The fakir was covered with blood and a cold fear overcame me. I was sure I had shot him. He was lying on his face on the ground, and there were no signs of breathing or movement of any sort. Quickly pulling my torch from the clamps that held it to the rifle-barrel, I began to search for the bullet hole, or possibly holes, that I felt certain I would find. I looked carefully enough, although my hands trembled violently. There were none. Then I turned the swami over. Possibly I would find what I was looking for on the other side.

That was when the fakir opened his eyes. They glittered in the torchlight with even greater hatred than the man-eater's. His lips moved slightly and I stopped to catch his words. They came faintly, haltingly, but I heard them all the same.

‘You win, white man; but the stars were against me this night. The tiger has taken my life; but so shall you die, too and I shall await your death at another tiger's jaws!’

Then the swami of Valaithothu passed on, just as had his counterpart, the man-eater, a few minutes earlier.

The explanation of events seemed simple enough. Due to cautious movements, the fakir had not known my abouts that night. When the man-eater had started calling, somewhere in the direction of the road beyond, the hermit had stolen out of his hut, guided by the tiger's calls,

knowing it was safe enough so long as the man-eater kept on roaring and he knew the animal's whereabouts. Undoubtedly he hoped to discover where I was hiding and to practise some form of deception, just as he had succeeded in doing two nights before.

Meanwhile, unknown to him, I had left my machan on the the hillside, stolen down to this hut and imitated the tiger's roars three times. The fakir must have been somewhere near the road at that moment. Hearing two separate roarings and believing there were two different tigers, one somewhere before him and one behind, and not knowing which of the two was the man-eater, the undeniably plucky man had at last lost his nerve and hastened back to the safety of his hut, thereby bringing the real man-eater in pursuit and disaster upon himself.

I walked to the settlement, where I found Boora still awake.

‘I have shot the tiger,' I announced. With bated breath, he asked: 'Where is the holy one, dorai?’

I shrugged, and sat on his threshold. 'He is dead, too' I muttered.

Boora sighed, almost in satisfaction. 'Do you now believe?" he asked me.

I laughed, saying, "The tiger killed him before I could shoot it!’

There was silence for a few seconds as Boora looked at me with widened, incredulous eyes.

‘Wh-what?' he mumbled, 'do you mean to say there are two of them; two dead bodies, the swami and the tiger!’

‘Certainly,’ I replied.

‘Are you sure there's not just one dead body - either the tiger, or the holy one?’

‘Absolutely certain; just as there are two of us - you and me,’ I answered in ruffled tones.

Boora began to call aloud the news to the people in the surrounding huts, and in a minute or two a dozen frightened Irilas stood around us.

‘What do you know, brothers,’ he announced, ‘My dorai has shot the tiger and the swamiji.’

I winced, then muttered abruptly, 'damn it, I told you tiger had killed the swami and I shot the tiger.’

‘Let’s see,' they all asked enthusiastically in a chorus.

A little later we were back at the scene of the tragedy, and the excited Irilas almost danced with joy. For their two worst enemies had died that night: the man-eater that ate them, and the fakir who had frightened them almost to death.

When Boora looked down into the still wide-open eyes of the swami, he muttered: 'You…!' and that was all he could say. Then followed two very bad words.

5 Bagh the Tiger

The half-light filtered into the recesses of the cave, and beyond lay darkness.

It was a small cave, twenty feet wide and about the same in length. Near the entrance lay some piled boulders with tufts of grass between them. The floor was formed of the same granite rock as the walls.

Something fluffy and reddish-brown in colour, with faint black markings and a head ludicrously large and out of proportion to the rest of its body, appeared through the grass growing between two of the boulders. A pair of bright eyes looked out upon the world in curiosity mixed with astonishment.

For this was the first time that Bagh, the tiger cub, had ventured as far as the entrance of the cavern in which he lived His two sisters were huddled together in a corner at the back just two balls of fur like himself, but less precocious, less adventurous.

Perhaps Bagh inherited some of the fiery dash and the cat bravery that made Timor, his father, king of the jungle.

For his sire was a fierce and fearless tiger, against whom even elephant hesitated to pit his strength.

Bagh had no recollection of Timor, for Seeta, his mother, removed her three cubs to this cave from the place where they had been born; a place which neither Bagh nor his sisters remember as their eyes were then closed. Seeta had moved because she knew that Timor, her mate, could not be relied upon. In a moment of carelessness he might tread upon one of them, perhaps breaking a little back or leg under his great weight. In a moment of anger he might gently slap another, and that slap, although to him a very mild gesture, would be enough to crush the cub into oblivion. And lastly there was always the danger that Timor might one day be inordinately hungry, so hungry that he would think nothing of making a light meal of one of his offspring, sufficient to serve as an appetiser until the next real meal came along.

At the moment the cubs were alone, for Seeta had left the cave. This was not at all usual, for she had never left them during the hours of daylight. She guarded the cave assiduously, only going out under cover of darkness to hunt for food for herself, food which comprised the other animals of the jungle and such domestic species, like cattle, as she could come across.

Fresh meat, until now, had not been a problem for the cubs, for Seeta still suckled her offspring that nestled and clawed their way through the fur on her belly to her teats, where they could have their fill. But fresh meat was very necessary for herself, because not only had she to maintain her own strength, but the strength of the three young lives that were dependent upon her.

But Seeta had heard a sound - the sound of human voices - and that had driven her out of the cave with mixed feelings of fear and anger. Fear, that some of the hated species walked upon two legs had come to hurt or destroy her family; anger, that members of this puny race should dare to come so close to the cave in which she had her young. All the wild animals kept far away.

Seeta glided down the hill from the prominence where the cave was situated. Her tread was silent and her powerful beautifully-striped body was lithe and graceful as she passed from boulder to boulder, taking advantage of every inch of natural cover, stealing nearer and ever nearer to the source of the disturbing sounds.

She saw them then. A party of wood-cutters, walking in single file across a spur of the hill towards the valley that lay beyond. Here they would spend the next few hours felling timber in accordance with a contract between the Government Forest Department and a neighbouring wood merchant. They chatted happily as they walked one behind the other, their axes on their shoulders, entirely oblivious of the tigress that even now was watching them.

Tumultuous thoughts raced through Seeta's mind as, with half-closed eyes she peered over a fallen tree trunk that lay across the jungle floor, her ears pressed tightly back against her skull, while she trembled violently with suppressed emotions of fear and rage. Her head lay low between extended forepaws and her hind legs were gathered beneath her belly, ready for the charge that would bring destruction to her enemies. Full length behind her on the ground lay her tail; only its tip twitched spasmodically, nervously, portraying her growing excitement

The wood-cutters drew closer as they followed the path that wound through the forest. Seeta held her position behind the tree-trunk, her muscles bunched and ready for instant while conflicting thoughts still raced through her feline brain. Those five men never knew that their fate lay in the balance that day, a balance that at any moment might be tipped against and bring a thundering, roaring demon upon their unsuspecting selves. But their karma was in their favour; their time had

not yet come; simply, they were lucky.

For at the last moment Seeta's inherent fear of the human race overcame her urge to cause their destruction. She still crouchcd; silent, trembling, but nevertheless passive. And then moment of danger passed; for the men were drawing away and their voices grew fainter, dispersed by the jungle breezes into the aisles of the forest. They turned a corner in the pathway and vanished from sight.

Seeta stood up, uttered a low guttural snarl, half in disdain and half in relief. She turned and started to ascend the hill, retracing the path by which she had come.

Bagh's wide and wondering eyes still gazed out into the sunlight of an Indian autumn when he saw something moving and drawing closer. Tiny as he was, he crouched backwards on his haunches, trembling violently, his ears flattening themselves against his little skull. Those lustrous eyes that had been so big and bright only a moment before half-closed themselves in rage and suspicion; a comical snarl contorted his baby face, and he spat viciously in the manner of an angry cat against the oncoming enemy who now looked large before him.

But it was only Seeta returning to her cave. She stopped beside him and stooped her massive head to lick him affectionately with a rough tongue. The gesture, although made with motherly love, was packed with such unconscious force that the cub tumbled over upon his back, where he lay with his four legs up in the air, his tiny claws extended menacingly in defence. Seeta rolled him over with another lick, gripping him gently by the scruff of his neck with her powerful fangs. She lifted him off the ground tenderly, lovingly, and carried him to the rear of the cave, his legs dangling helplessly in that powerful yet gentle grip. There she dropped him at the spot where his two sisters, Meena and Leela, were still huddled in wonder at what was happening, but relieved at return of their mother.

Seeta licked all three vigorously, cleaning and brushing down their little fluffy coats. For the soft, fine hair that the coat of an adult tiger had not yet appeared and would not do so for nearly four more months.

Then she flopped down on the rocky floor beside them and roiled over on her back with her four legs apart. It was an invitation to her babies. Simultaneously they crawled over to her, each little mouth seeking a teat, while three pairs of forepaws worked themselves into the long hair of her belly, rubbing and coaxing the milk to flow into the three

eager little mouths.

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Bagh thrilled with excitement. For something special seemed to be happening today.

He was older. Four months had passed and his baby fur had given way to the reddish-brown and black hair-markings of an adult tiger. Moreover, he had become noticeably bigger and heavier than either of his sisters. His head, for one thing was more massive, while his paws were proportionately larger than theirs. What was most important, he was bolder, fiercer and had a deeper growl.

Until now, the three cubs had been content to gambol in the twilight of the cave. Once or twice they had tumbled outside. At first, Seeta had curbed their adventurous spirit by voicing a low, rolling, purring sound, to call them back. Whichever of them did not heed her was punished at once by a slap of her forepaw that would be enough to send the erring cub scurrying into the cave as fast as it could scramble.

But this evening everything had been rather different. Seeta stepped outside the cave and looked back at them, emitting a throaty mewing sound. They had approached her hesitantly, expecting to be reprimanded for doing so. But she had again walked forward a few paces. Then she had looked back and once more. They had followed her again. For the third time, she had advanced and called them, and they had followed. Thus, leading the way, Seeta took them on their first journey into the jungle - that vast expanse of hill and dale, valley and mountain; of mighty, giant, vine-entangled timber and dense bush; of grassy glades and crystal-clear streams, where the water gurgled and purled over pebbly stones and between rocky boulders and the gnarled roots to many plants. The jungle, so black and forbidding on dark nights when the fire-flies flitted like elfin lamps between the boles of massive trees; that looked so different on moonlit nights under the brilliant light of the Queen of the Night as she sailed her majestic way through the star-spangled ocean of the sky; that could be so awesome on a stormy night as it reverberated to the crash of thunder, while the brilliant lightning streaked across the rain-laden clouds with the pattern of giant rivers on a map, and the clouds emptied themselves in solid sheets of water, turning the trickling streamlets into raging torrents. The jungle that could be so silent and yet so noisy, as it resounded to the roars of Timor the tiger, or the agonised shriek of his dying victim; that appeared so lonely, yet throbbed with hidden life; that could be so cruel and was yet so kind; that would be for these three cubs a place of unrestrained freedom„ where they could roam at will; that would be

their home!

Seeta did not take them far that evening. Perhaps just a couple of hundred yards. But enough to impress on their playful minds that there was a bigger world, where there was Perhaps much more to do than just romp and play and eat and sleep, as they had been doing since they were born.

She took them out again the following evening, and considerably further this time, bringing them back to their rocky home at dusk.

The third day was a red-letter day in their lives. This time Seeta led them out of the cave much later than she had ever done before. The rim of the sun was sinking behind the jagged mountain to the west as she glided gracefully downhill, the rippling muscles of her shoulders bunching and unbunching themselves at each step, the three cubs stumbling and falling clumsily over the stones behind her. And then they reached the foot of the hillock and the ground became more level.

Seeta led them along a narrow, winding game-trail. The jungle walled them in on both sides. Frequently she would stop in her tracks, obviously listening or waiting for something. Instinct prompted the three cubs, walking in single file behind her, to stop too. Of course, they had not yet learned to listen. In any case, they would not know what to listen for. After perhaps a mile they came to a little muddy water-hole. Trees and long grass grew all around.

Seeta led them off the track for some yards. Then she crouched down, flat to the ground, behind a particularly big clump of lemon-grass. The cubs snuggled close beside her.

Bagh thought the opportunity a good one to sneak a little milk, and began to burrow his small wet nose beneath his mother's belly in an effort to find one of her teats. This time she growled almost inaudibly while she struck him a heavy blow with her right forepaw. The blow was just a casual one, but it knocked Bagh over, and he sprawled on his back in the long grass, dazed and hurt by the unexpected action. With his big eyes he gazed at her in wonderment. Seeta was taking no further interest in him. She had resumed her posture of rapt attention, waiting and watching for he knew not what.

Bagh slowly struggled to his feet. Hesitantly and apologetically he crept back to crouch at his mother's side.

They remained thus huddled together for quite a long time.

Then Seeta appeared to flatten herself still closer to the ground, massive head sinking between outstretched forepaws.

Simultaneously, she drew her hind legs up beneath her, while top of her outstretched tail began to bob up and down jerkily. For a moment Bagh was tempted to play with it.

The cubs continued to watch their mother and copied her every movement. Then they heard it: the faintest of sounds, but nevertheless clearly audible. A pebble had been overturned somewhere and had clinked faintly against another. What could have caused that pebble to move?

Seconds later they heard the faint sound of something rather heavy brushing its way gently and cautiously through the undergrowth that overlapped the trail along which they had just come.

Seeta drew her hind feet even closer and tighter beneath her. The tip of her tail lashed from side to side, and her whole supple frame quivered gently.

The brushing sound drew nearer. It was now almost opposite their hiding-place. Seeta raised her body ever so slightly off the ground. Then she began to rock herself backwards and forwards imperceptibly. It was a graceful, soundless, rhythmic motion. Little did the cubs know she was balancing her body for the charge that was to follow.

Then, as if propelled by a giant spring, her striped frame hurtled through the air.

The splendid spotted stag - for that was the animal that had been approaching the water-hole - had been particularly cautious in reaching the pool. He was well aware of the many dangers lurking in the dense undergrowth that surrounded it on all sides. Many of his kind had already fallen prey to the hungry jaws of tigers, the cruel claws of panthers, the insatiable ferocity of wild dogs and the subtle cunning of human poachers who had from time to time hiddcn in the undergrowth and ambushed them on the way.

For a some time, the stag had been sniffing the air for a sign of danger, but there seemed to be none. True, there was a strong wind blowing from the south-west, a herald of the oncoming monsoon that would disperse the scent of any foe hidden to the east of the game-trail. The spotted-stag felt far more secure if he had been able to circumvent pool on that dangerous eastern side. But the brush was thick, and even he could not force his dappled body through the interlacing barrier.

So he had deliberately made a noise by brushing his side against the bushes, hoping to tempt any hidden carnivore other enemy to launch its attack while there was still room and time enough for him to wheel around and flee to safety. But nothing had happened. There had been no attack, and no sign of any sort to cause him alarm.

So the stag was reassured that there was no immediate danger. In any case, he was very thirsty. It had been a hot dry day, and he had not drunk water since the previous night at another pool nearly five miles away. So he advanced a few more mincing steps towards the muddy rim.

Suddenly all hell was let loose. There was a mighty rushing noise. A series of loud roars burst upon him, deafening his twitching ears. The stag wheeled about and began to run. But it was too late.

Before he could gather speed, an elongated brown and black striped form burst from cover and hurtled through the air, landing upon his back with a heavy thud. A mighty jaw with long, cruel fangs bit into his neck and throat, while talons, on two massive paws, encircled each shoulder,

‘Aa-rrh! Aa-rrh! Ai-eee!' he shrieked in terror and pain as he crumpled to the earth with the colossal weight upon him.

There came a pistol-like report as his neck was twisted and snapped like a dry twig. The last piteous appeal for help, a drawn-out and plaintive 'Aa-aaa-rrh!' went unheeded and died in his throat, as the stag's life sped into the jungle void whence it had come. The already-dead legs drummed a quick tattoo of hoofs that never again would walk those forest glades they had loved so well. Then the jungle was silent again. Seeta had made a quick, clean kill.

Bagh and his two sisters were taken aback by the rapid sequence of events. At one moment, their mother had been with them; at the next, she had launched herself at the unseen object which they had heard moving along the jungle trail. There had followed the loud thud of a body falling heavily to the ground, a succession of agonised screams, the dhup-dhup-dhup sound of something beating rapidly against the earth, and then silence, utter and complete.

The cubs bunched together, cowering in a huddled, trembling, frightened group. Perhaps something terrible had happened to their mother. Then Seeta called them with her low, guttural but persistent summons.

Hesitantly they disentangled themselves and crept forward cautiously

and fearfully. They saw Seeta standing over a fallen animal, her muzzle and jaws dripping with something red - the red of freshly spilled blood!

A transformation suddenly overcame the three cubs. A moment earlier they had been trembling with fear. Now they were three small demons, growling loudly at the sight and smell of the rich red blood that covered the dappled hide of the dead stag. They snarled and spat at each other. Then Bagh, heavier and bolder than his two sisters, suddenly fell upon Leela, the youngest of the trio, who had taken a pace towards the dead animal. With claws fully extended, he slapped her quickly across the face and snout with rapid, right, right and left blows of his paws, and before she could recover from her surprise, he bit her viciously on the ear with his sharp young teeth

The cubs were accustomed to rough play among themselves, but little Leela realised for the first time that this was no game. It was a vicious and deliberate onslaught by her infuriated brother. She gave ground and moved a couple of yards away behind a 'vellari' bush that afforded protection against further attack. But Bagh had lost interest in Leela as he saw his other sister, Meena, approaching the fallen stag. He sprang upon her in turn and bit her on the neck, while his left hind-foot raked her right side with its sharp claws. But Meena was made of sterner stuff than Leela. Twisting around beneath him to free her neck, Meena rolled on to her back, gathered her hind legs together beneath Bagh's belly, and drove upwards and backwards with all her might. Bagh screamed with pain as the talons scored deep parallel scratches through the protecting white fur on his stomach and into the soft skin beneath. Now it was Bagh's turn to take shelter and leave his sister, Meena, complete mistress of the situation for the moment.

Seeta had squatted down on her haunches and was alternately regarding the dead stag and her squabbling cubs. Now she walked around to the rear end of the kill. Borrowing her head between its thighs, she tore open the outer skin with one powerful wrench. There was a splitting, ripping sound and the stag's bowels spilled out upon the green jungle grass. Excrement that had already formed into balls and was about to be shed tumbled from the ruptured guts. Seeta lowered her head and sniffed the mess for a few seconds. Despite her poor sense of smell, her snout wrinkled in disgust. Then she settled herself on the ground and stretched her right forepaw into the hole she had made. She groped inside, finding the stomach and upper intestines with her long hooked claws. Methodically and purposefully she drew them out of the dead animal to join bowels and excrement on the ground before her. The stomach burst, disgorging half-digested

grass and levels. Blood from of the cavity trickled out in a sluggish stream to form a small pool on the sward, and quickly soaked into the dried earth.

but Seeta was still not satisfied, for like all tigers she was a clean feeder. With her paw and teeth, she gathered the mess together and dragged it along the ground for a few feet. Then, assured that it was not in her way, she returned to the kill and settled down to a meal. With her head against the hole she had made, and which was now quite large, she seized a thigh and tore away a large chunk of flesh and skin, which she began to swallow in great mouthfuls.

The three cubs had now forgotten their recent differences and, attracted by the sight and smell of fresh meat and blood, approached from different directions. Excited, ravenous, and the hunting instinct and lust for blood strong within them, they snarled, growled, scratched and bit at each other and at Seeta, indiscriminately. Meena, emboldened by her recent victory over Bagh, suddenly fastened her jaws into the end of a strip of flesh and hide which Seeta was in the process of eating. Growling and spitting viciously, she shook her head vigorously in an attempt to loosen Seeta's hold at the other end.

But she had made a bad mistake and fundamental one at that. No animal, not even a tigress with cubs, is disposed to relinquish its food to another animal voluntarily, even to its own cub. With a short and savage roar, Seeta lunged at the erring Meena with her mighty paw, catching the cub on the side of its head and sending it rolling away, half-stunned by the force of the blow, but taught once and for all one of the elementary laws of the jungle: never take the risk of approaching too close to a feeding tiger.

And thus Seeta ate until she had gorged her fill and the mangled bones of the stag remained, with its four feet and neck, and head still resplendent with its magnificent of antlers.

Then she got to her feet, moved a few paces away, and flopped to the earth, to look with half-closed eyes on the scene before her.

That action was the unspoken word of consent to the three youngsters that permission had now been given them to take their turn at the feast. Nor did they require a second bidding.

With growls and snarls they fell upon the remains of the stag; struggling, twisting and squirming among blood, flesh and bones till their striped young hides were soon sullied and ruffled, and their little faces and heads, so recently pretty with the innocence of cubhood, looked demoniacal.

That was the first great adventure and it lived in their immature little minds for quite a long time. It showed them that Seeta, their mother, had to kill so that they should eat; it gave them the smell and taste of freshly-shed warm blood, and of meat still warm from a body from which the spark of life had just fled; and it imbued within them a longing to kill for themselves, to take a life and eat of its conquered flesh and drink its still-flowing blood.

Seeta took her three cubs out on her hunting excursions every evening after that. At times they would meet with no success and they would return late at night or in the early hours of the morning, exhausted and ravenously hungry, to their forlorn little cave. An empty stomach would drive one or other of the cubs to seek for food at the old source from which they had been accustomed to take it - Seeta's now-depleted udders, But the tigress would resent the attempt and cuff, slap or even bite the cub without compunction. For their teeth had become long and sharp, and their claws uncomfortably powerful. They hurt soft skin of her belly and scratched her teats as they burrowed their way for milk.

With the increase of protein in their diet as a result of these forages, the cubs grew rapidly both in physique and in hunting skill. Two months later, Bagh made his first independent 'kill'. Of course, up to now he had chased and slaughtered such small things as he had come across, some for food and others for fun or just because they annoyed him: large grasshoppers and butterflies, a number of frogs, bamboo-rats and bush-mice, squirrels and young birds that could not yet fly properly, and other small insects and reptiles he had encountered. Once, while Seeta's attention was elsewhere, he had located a porcupine's burrow and had attempted to dig out the inmate. The porcupine had resented the intrusion and had charged out backwards, badly lacerating Bagh with its sharp quills and leaving a couple embedded in his face. His right eye had narrowly escaped damage, and it was some days before the quills had loosened themselves and fallen out. From that time he kept far from burrows of all kinds, whether they belonged to a porcupine or any other creature.

Leela, the innocent, had disturbed a Russell's viper having its midday siesta beneath a clump of grass. She had stepped on the grass and heard a hiss: her conjecture had been correct, the sound came from the large fat snake with three rows of dark brown diamond markings along its back. The viper struck fiercely, but instinct had warned Leela just in time. She sprang aside as the vicious spade-shaped head, with jaws agape and poison-fangs erect, struck the spot where she had been standing a moment earlier. The viper had repeatedly hissed its disapproval at being disturbed, while Leela regarded it with curiosity

and a cocked head - but now from a safe distance. Then she had decided it was something strange that appeared to be dangerous and therefore best left alone, and had scampered on to rejoin the rest of the family.

Many such little incidents had befallen all of them till that second memorable day - the day on which Bagh made his first real 'kill'. His kill was a full-grown peacock!

Peacocks are very shy birds indeed and are among the most alert of the sentinels of the jungle. They have marvellous sight and an instinct that makes them aware of the presence of any hidden foe, whatever its nature. Normally, an inexperienced tiger-cub like Bagh would not have had the ghost of a chance of coming anywhere near without being detected. But this particular peacock had been injured. Just about a week earlier, he had flown down to the fields in the village some miles away and had been feeding on the ragi and jowari grains that grew there. Had it been northern India, the bird would have been safe, as all peafowl are regarded as sacred and nobody is allowed to harm them. But the same protection is not afforded to them in the south. The villagers in this part of the country, especially those living in forest areas, have fewer scruples and welcome the opportunity to add a big, fat, succulent roast to their rather sparse and somewhat monotonous menu of rice or ragi balls.

The peacock had alighted on the field of Ramdass, and what was most unfortunate - for the peacock - was the fact that Ramdass happened to be hiding in a corner of it with his old muzzle-loader, primed and cocked, at his side. The shot was a long one, but Ramdass had taken the chance and fired. Two jagged pieces of lead had penetrated and smashed the bone of the birds' right wing. The peacock had tried to fly, but found it impossible. His great weight required a running start and the full use of both wings before he could become airborne. So he had done the next best thing. He had run headlong back to the jungle that bordered the field and had disappeared before Ramdass could reload.

The week that ensued had been very difficult. He had had to subsist on such scarce morsels as he could find on the ground, and shelter at nights in the recesses of some bush instead of the tops of the trees where his companions foregathered to spend the hours of darkness in safety.

For his bad luck, the peacock had been feeding on the bloodred meaty fruit of a cactus bush that evening when he sensed the family of tigers approaching. For a moment he had forgotten his inability to fly to safety among the highest branches of the nearest tree. But that

mistake and that moment's delay cost him his life. For, turning a corner in the trail, Bagh saw him and gave chase. Too late, the peacock remembered he could not fly and scampered along the ground, trying to take cover under bushes or whatever shelter offered. But Bagh was young and energetic. Moreover, he was eager to make a really big kill and saw in the fleeing peacock an opportunity to achieve his ambition. He followed in hot pursuit and at last succeeded in seizing the bird's tail as it was vanishing beneath a lantana bush.

Holding firmly with his teeth, Bagh drew the wildly-flapping peacock out of cover. Then, relinquishing his hold of the tail, Bagh had quickly grasped the slender neck, swathed as it was in the emerald and deep blue of tiny, brilliant feathers. One crunch of his sharp white teeth and the bright red blood crept through those beautiful colours. That neck, that had been so supple and slender only a moment before, now fell back as the bones disintegrated beneath the powerful bite. The legs kicked wildly, one wing flapped a few times in despair. But the peacock was already dead, its beak agape as the spark of life fled from its shattered frame.

Bagh had made his first real kill, and he was very proud. But he was not allowed to enjoy this ecstasy for long. Meena and Leela had seen what was happening. With envy, they looked at the large bird hanging from his mouth. in unison they fell upon him, trying to pull the bird away, for A free-for-all fight ensued, while from behind a a short distance away, Seeta watched with eyes of patience, but also of pride, at prowess of her male offspring and the of two daughters in attacking him.

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From that time. Bagh and his two sisters made big strides in the art of hunting and killing their natural prey, and soon they were able to tackle the bigger creatures fearlessly and successfully. The large sambar stag and the fierce old wild-boar were still considered too powerful and too war-like; while old Bruin, the irascible black sloth-bear, although quite a coward really, would scream and make such a noise if they came near him that the very pandemonium would drive them away.

The cubs grew rapidly after that and became almost as big as Seeta, their mother. By then they were adepts at killing, and animals of all sorts, except the powerful bison and the lordly elephant, had fallen prey to their skill at some time or the other. Seeta had helped them at the beginning in some of these encounters, but very soon they were able, individually, to look after themselves and kill their prey neatly by breaking the neck, as Seeta had so often shown them to do.

This had taken time and she had taken considerable pains to perfect them in this art. The tigress had begun by killing three or four cattle at a time from the same herd, while the cubs ran beside her, watching her bring down the prey. Her method, they observed - and in this observation they were assisted more by instinct than by actually watching their mother - was to spring upon the back of the victim, and, while taking a firm grip of its shoulders with each of her powerful forepaws, reach over and grasp its throat in her enormous jaws. Then she would tug upwards and round. The mighty tug, together with the weight of the tigress on its back and the weight of the victim itself, would throw the creature off balance, and it would turn over and crash to cart with the slayer on the top. This sudden turningover motion, coupled with combined weights of the attacker and the prey, produced such a sudden strain on the victim's vertebrae that the neck would invariably snap as the body hit the ground. The animal would die instantly, although Seeta would maintain her grip on its throat for a minute or two more, to make quite certain.

The cubs had passed through many stages before they could attain perfection in this art. Their earlier efforts, practised on smaller prey, were just immature grab-as-grab-can tactics. Often they would make a mess of things and the animal would escape, badly bitten and lacerated by the cubs' claws. At other times they would actually bite it to death. As their experience grew, they would kill in the way a panther did, by gripping the throat of their prey and holding on tightly until they literally chocked it to death. The art of breaking the neck came to them only after they were perhaps eighteen months old and had acquired enough bodily weight and sufficient strength of grip to hang on.

But eventually they did succeed, and that was the time when, in accordance with the laws of the jungle and the provisions of an all-wise Nature, the stage was reached when their existence as a family came to an end and they began to fend for themselves.

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It was late October. The worst of the monsoon had passed and Storm-tossed rain-laden clouds from the south-west no longer scudded across the sky to deluge the jungle with torrential showers. In fact, the winds were now blowing from the Opposite direction, bringing occasional but lighter showers from the north-east. In the intervals between these few rainy days, the weather was magnificent, the sun shone warmly, and the forest was newly clothed in fresh leaves on every tree, bush and shrub and even the long and strongly-scented lemon grass. Multi-coloured orchids, dull-green beardlike moss and the

drab, grey lichen that mantled the erstwhile bare rocks, all looked fresh and clean.

It was autumn, and also the beginning of the mating season for the carnivorous creatures of the Indian jungles. Tigers, and panthers too, were beginning to seek their mates, and in their seeking became impatient and demanding.

Among these animals, it is the female that first feels the urge, and she freely ventilates her feelings by proclaiming to the jungle at large that she wants a spouse. The imperious mating call of the tigress and the lesser but persistent sawing of the pantheress are an open invitation to the males of both species in the vicinity that a lady is in urgent need of a lover. Domestic cats do the same, and just as the 'toms' in the neighbourhood hasten to respond, their bigger and wild brethren hurry to oblige the lady.

The urge had lain dormant in Seeta for the last eighteen months. For one thing, her attention had been occupied by the cubs. She had their welfare and education to complete. Secondly, an adult tiger, particularly at the time of wooing, is intolerant of the presence of other members of his species, large or small. A lover would surely have devoured her cubs.

Now they were bigger, but yet not big enough for a trial of strength against a fully-grown tiger. Seeta knew that before she invited a new lover she would have to part with her present family, and this she proceeded to do by the simple expedient of being as nasty as possible to them, seeking to drive them away as soon as she could.

Bagh and his two sisters were surprised by the change in their mother's behaviour. She who had been so considerate to them now growled and bit savagely if they dared to approach an animal she had slain. Even when any of the three youngsters brought down a prey and Seeta happened to be in the vicinity, she would pounce upon the dead animal and rap viciously at her progeny with her talons if they dared to approach.

Meena and Leela left sad about this change in their mother's attitude and made repeated attempts at reconciliation by pathetically mewing in their gruff manner, even turning over on their backs to allow Seeta to bite and scratch them. Bagh, being a male, although he had also attempted to placate his mother at first, soon began to retaliate and mild fights ensued.

One day a climax was reached. Seeta had succeeded in killing a big sambar doe and was about to begin her meal when Bagh approached

from the other end, hoping to be allowed a share. But Seeta sprang at him and slapped him angrily across the face, her sharp claws digging into his soft flesh. The pain infuriated Bagh, and he retaliated by attacking his mother. A furious fight followed, during which Seeta showed no quarter whatever. She inflicted a number of vicious wounds on her cub with her powerful teeth and talons, which Bagh returned to the best of his ability. But superior weight and experience began to tell, and after ten minutes or so of desperate fighting, he withdrew from the contest, a badly hurt young tiger, who came to the conclusion that his mother no longer wanted his company. However, for some days after that, Bagh still remained in the vicinity of the three females, although at a discreet distance. Meena and Leela continued to stay with their mother, but her nastiness was becoming more and more apparent.

At about this time Seeta began her mating call, which reverberated through the jungle and across the deep valleys from hill to hill. Particularly at night she would send forth her imperious summons that could be heard for miles.

It was not long after that, about three days in fact, when the cubs heard one evening the answer to her invitation.

At first, the significance of the sound did not strike them as important, as they had heard the call of their own kind before and had come to recognise the sound of an adult tiger. But this time the roars grew nearer and nearer, and an hour later a big male tiger walked into the clearing where Seeta was seated on her haunches with lashing tail, while Meena and Leela sprawled together some distance away. Bagh was also there, but he crouched at the farther end of the clearing as he had not approached his mother again after his severe mauling.

The newcomer, a magnificent male, walked in leisurely fashion across the clearing and came to a halt before Seeta, who got up from her sitting position and, with tail held erect, mildly snarled at the tiger. He came closer to her and attempted to lick her face, which act of courtship she rewarded sharp blow upon his neck.

But this was not an act of enmity or repulsion, for loveplay among tigers is of the roughest sort. It is rather intended to urge the male to greater efforts to woo the tigress on the principle that the best things are hardest to get. He came closer and redoubled his advances.

Meena and Leela, seeing the new arrival, held back because, up to then, Seeta had not permitted any strange tiger to approach them. Now, inquisitively and probably playfully too, they both came forward to investigate for themselves who this stranger might be. Their well-meaning efforts this time met with a surprisingly rude response. Both

Seeta and the tiger turned upon them and bit savagely.

In their usual manner of surrender, they rolled upon their on the ground, but the adult tigers gave them no quarter till, with screams of fear and pain, they scrambled to their feet and bolted into the jungle.

Bagh had been the silent witness and it had confirmed in his mind the fact that Seeta wanted nothing more to do with her recent family. He soon found Leela and Meena crouching in a thicket, sadly licking their wounds, while the love-play of Seeta and her new mate grew more noisy and vigorous, to culminate in a veritable pandemonium of roars, snarls and grunts as the sex-urge drove the participants to its climax.

After some time, Bagh wandered away and Leela and Meena accompanied him. They were still not able to break their old family ties completely, and for some weeks, they hunted in unison and shared their meals as they had been accustomed to do in earlier days.

But this did not last for long. The cubs were rapidly growing in size, experience and selfishness, and the instinctive longing to fend for themselves soon overcame any lingering memories. Bagh was the first to break away completely, which he did one day after a fight over another kill in which Leela and Meena were joined against him. From then on, he was on his own and felt responsible to no one. All that mattered was himself, and the main purpose in view was to keep his stomach well filled.

The forest in which the tigers lived was well stocked with game and Seeta's teaching had been thorough, so that Bagh found comparatively little difficulty in looking after himself and his stomach. Nevertheless, he made an error in judgement one day when he saw a nice fat wild-boar rooting at the base of a tree, against the bole of which a creeper rose to the topmost branches. The boar knew that creeper had bulbous roots which were good to eat and he was determined to eat them. This made him oblivious to Bagh's silent approach until with a roar, the young tiger leapt upon his back.

The impetus of the attack bore the pig to the ground, but the boar managed to squirm over while the lashing of his hooves momentarily disconcerted Bagh. That mistake was a bad one and it proved to have very painful consequences for the young tiger. For no sooner did the boar get to his feet than he lunged forward with his sharp tusks, one of which embedded itself in Bagh's side, The boar tossed his head upwards and the tusk ripped through the young tiger's soft skin, to lay open a gaping wound from which blood spurted, staining the nose of his antagonist a deep red. Surprise and pain caused Bagh to rush madly forward. But he was as yet inexperienced and made the further

mistake of executing a head-on attack on the infuriated boar. Although lacerated badly by the sweeping talons of the tiger, the pig lunged again, this time against Bagh's chest, and succeeded in inflicting another terrible gash.

Bagh jumped backwards to break off the combat and to crouch, breathing heavily, against the ground, to recover his scattered wits and consider how to deal with this fearful antagonist.

But a wild-boar is one of the most courageous animals in the Indian jungle, and now that porky's blood was up he did not require time for consideration. With lowered head and flashing tusks, he charged headlong at the discomfited tiger. Bagh saw him coming, and that terrible countenance with its bloodied snout, mingled with its own blood pouring from the numerous wounds he himself had inflicted, caused Bagh to decide that discretion was the better part of valour. Turning tail, he bolted into the jungle while the boar had the temerity to follow for nearly a hundred yards, the glorious and undeniable victor of the encounter.

Bagh had Learned a useful lesson, although a very painful. In future he knew that, once having got a grip on his foe, he should never, under any circumstances, release it. Secondly, the wild-boar had proved a redoubtable opponent and he would have to think twice before tackling another. And the third lesson that Bagh learned that day was to never make the mistake of charging head-on into an animal that had the courage and the natural weapons with which to make a counter-attack.

Then on another day, Bagh had one more severe lesson. It was early dawn and the sun had not yet risen. He was strolling along a game path that wound through the dew-spangled bushes and under canopies of overhanging trees where everything still lay in gloom. The path came out at the foot of a hillock and traversed the base of a jutting rock. Suddenly Bagh noticed a black object before him, moving away but using the same path. At that distance, it was a queer creature that kept going from side to side of the track, stopping every now and then. Whatever it was, Bagh decided it was good enough for his next meal. In three bounds, he overtook the creature which was apparently unaware of his approach from behind, and leaped upon it. Then it was that he received a rude awakening. This strange creature - which turned out to be a porcupine - was not strange to Bagh by any means, for he had met its fellows before when in the company of Seeta and his sisters, and had already suffered. Seeta had never attacked a porcupine while the cubs had been with her, but as it was a comparatively small creature, Bagh felt quite capable of handling the situation appropriately. Also, he was thirsting for revenge. Had a

porcupine not hurt him once before?

But the tiger had badly underestimated his puny opponent and was in for a nasty surprise. At the very last moment, sense or instinct, or perhaps both, warned the porcupine that he was in danger from behind. Instead of running away, as any animal would have done, and so Bagh Certainly expected, the porcupine did just the opposite. Spectacularly, it grew larger and as it raised its quills and rushed backwards, full into Bagh's face as he bounded towards it.

The impact was disastrous so far as Bagh was concerned. Although he struck the creature with his forepaw, the result was to dislodge the quills, many of which stuck in his face and neck, while others embedded themselves in the pads of his paws. For the second time, one narrowly missed his eye and lodged just beneath it, while another stuck in his palate.

There was a sharp rattling sound as the porcupine adjusted itself after the first attack and prepared to follow-up with another But Bagh had had enough. With 'whoofs' of pain, he made off as fast as he could.

For three months after that, he licked and bit at the wounds caused by the sharp quills. More by good luck than anything else he managed to extract them, except for the one that had lodged itself beneath his eye. That one broke off, leaving about two inches of its length under the flesh. In time this festered and turned into an open suppurating sore and eventually into an abscess.

Meanwhile, Bagh was unable to hunt normally. In fact, until he had succeeded in dislodging the quills that had embedded themselves in his pads, he could scarcely walk. Those were lean days indeed, when he ate whatever he found that could not escape him in his maimed condition. Fortunately, there was a large water-hole in that part of the jungle. It was rather more in the nature of a small tank than a water-hole and was inhabited by many frogs. These, and the few crabs that he could catch, were his diet during those awful days. Even snails and grasshoppers were better than nothing as he rapidly lost flesh and strength.

Eventually he managed to get rid of the quills in his forepaws. Nature is a marvellous healer and Bagh's wounds healed rapidly, although he was still troubled with the quill beneath his eye. Nevertheless, he could hunt again and he made up for the dreadful days he had just been through by killing and eating vigorously until he gradually restored his strength. Then came the abscess and the great pain and swelling that closed his eye completely. But once more Nature came to his rescue, and when the abscess eventually burst, the two inches of broken quill

came out with the pus that poured from the cavity.

Another month passed before Bagh was perfectly fit. He had been through a harrowing time indeed. But he had learned a second and even more valuable lesson. The next time he saw a porcupine, it was Bagh and not the porcupine that ran away.

While all this was happening, Bagh had not only lost sight of his sisters, Meena and Leela, completely, but had entirely forgotten them. Memories of his mother lingered vaguely, but they were only shadows of a forgotten past. All that now mattered to him was to live and eat contentedly and to enjoy each moment of the nights he spent in hunting, followed by days of lazy slumber beneath a shady tree.

In this way another year and a half passed. Bagh was now about three years old and had become an adult tiger. He had lived and hunted alone since the family broke up and thoughts of companionship had never crossed his mind.

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It was autumn once again and the jungle had assumed its postmonsoon glory. Everything was fresh and green after the recent rains and life was indeed a joyous thing.

Bagh then began to experience a hitherto unknown and unaccountable restlessness. But nature seemed to drive him on, and when occasionally he happened to meet a tiger, he did turn away and mind his own business. Instead he would look at it repeatedly and even approach a little closer. The usual result of such inquisitiveness was a deep-throated growl warning snarl. Nevertheless, Bagh would linger and look again. All unknown to him, instinct was asserting itself and the inner promptings of sex were causing him to seek a mate.

Then one day he heard it: a loud, insistent and imperious moan. It was a tigress calling. Bagh did not associate it with the sounds that Seeta had made eighteen months previously on that memorable day when she had sought her own new mate and parted company with her cubs so callously. There was no reason whatever, beyond intuition, to cause him to roar in reply and hurry towards the author of the sound. He hurried along and then, behind a bush, he came upon the moaning tigress sitting on her haunches and calling just as his own mother had done, while her tail lashed and twitched behind her, ceaselessly, in anticipation of an answer to her summons.

Bagh dallied with his newly found mate for the next few days. He seemed to have found favour in her sight for, apart from the normal

roughness in which they both indulged during their love-play and frequent acts of mating, she ceased her calling and appeared to be well content with his amorous exhibitions. For a tigress, it could be said she displayed a modicum of affection towards her suitor.

Yet, some four days after Bagh had met the tigress and while they were intently engaged in caressing each other with bites and scratches and occasional rough licking, another male broke in upon the intimate scene. He was rather an old fellow, somewhat past his prime, to judge by the appearance of his pale and sparse coat, but nevertheless a big specimen.

He eyed the scene till the enamoured couple became aware of his presence. Bagh growled menacingly. The female growled menacingly. But the newcomer growled even more growled menacingly.

Instinct appeared to appraise him of the situation at first glance. He saw that the tigress was in her prime, but still young, her suitor was also young and probably inexperienced in the art of courting. He himself had about ten years of life behind him and was determined to claim this young creature as his mate, having little doubt that he would be able to defeat Bagh if it came to a fight. Perhaps he thought that if he made a sufficiently ferocious demonstration, he would be able to frighten the young male away.

Accordingly the old tiger began to roar vociferously and growl hideously. At the same time, he advanced step by step towards Bagh, inwardly hoping that if he allowed sufficient time, the latter's courage would weaken, and that he would consider discretion the better part of valour and leave the field to the older suitor.

But for once the experienced tiger was wrong. Bagh was made of sterner stuff. Threats served only to goad him to fury. Apart from that he had already enjoyed three or four days of ardent love-making and was not disposed to abandon these pleasures to a rival. Rather than retreat, he laid back his own ears and roared as hideously as the advancing newcomer. The scene was set for a fight.

The tigress, anticipating what was coming, soon forgot her affection for Bagh and lissomly walked to one side of the clearing to watch events. No doubt she was filled with the same feelings of pride and excitement as members of her own sex among the human race, when about to witness two suitors do battle.

The older tiger was only a few yards away when Bagh rushed upon him with a roar and at avalanche speed. But his Opponent was a wily beast who had known combats of this kind before. He leapt nimbly

aside, and as Bagh flashed past, raked him with his right paw and then followed up his temporary advantage by leaping upon Bagh and fastening his jaws in the younger animal's neck. It was a veritable death-grip and might have brought the fight to a short and inglorious end for bagh had not youth and strength been with him.

He somersaulted head-over-heels, and in that quick adroit move turned the tables completely. The older tiger shot over his back and hit the ground heavily, although his teeth remained fastened in Bagh's neck. Perhaps the force of the fall partially winded him, for Bagh felt the grip slacken slightly. He tore himself free at the cost of a gaping wound in his own neck and a portion of skin still between the teeth of his adversary.

The youngster's blood was up now and before the new suitor could recover himself, Bagh charged and grabbed his adversary between ear and throat. The two animals bit and scratched savagely, tearing each other in a hundred places. But Bagh's hold on his adversary's neck was inexorable. Although the older animal struggled fiercely and raked Bagh repeatedly with his flaying hind limbs, he could not wrench himself free, nor could he effectively bite his opponent in return while his head was held in that vice-like clutch.

The tawny striped coats of the two tigers were red with blood and the surrounding shrubs and grass were flung up as the struggling animals fought for a foothold and strained against each other's might.

All this while the female watched complacently, either walking around the contestants in a distant circle or sitting on her haunches. She did not attempt to interfere and it seemed evident that her feminine vanity enjoyed to the full the titanic struggle for her favours that was being waged between the two males.

Slowly but surely, age bcgan to give way before the greater endurance of youth. Despite the older animals' experience it was obvious, he was beginning to tire. But at last, he managed to free himself, though part of his skull and jaw-bone were exposed where the flesh had been torn away; and Bagh, madder than ever, was intent upon killing his adversary who, to judge his gasps, was clearly on the point of collapse. His wild struggles were no longer those of a combatant trying to win, of a creature madly endeavouring to escape and save its own life.

At last, he managed to break off the fight and in that moment turned tail to flee ignominiously. But Bagh recognised his advantage and followed up, leaping upon his tottering adversary and biting him again and again. The old animal fought back as best he could and in the

course of their scuffle, they rolled down a neighbouring nullah to its sandy bed. To his good fortune, a clump of dried reeds grew there and he managed to roll inside, Bagh following him, still intent upon making a kill.

Just at that moment the female, who had been left behind at the place where the fight had started, called softly. Bagh heard the call. In his excited state, thinking that another suitor had arrived, he released the old tiger and leapt up the side of the nullah to his mate, intent upon tackling the new adversary. Gasping for breath and pouring with blood from a hundred wounds, the beaten tiger seized this opportunity to make good his escape.

No other admirer challenged Bagh for his mate after that, and for three weeks she remained his undisputed prize And then the mating urge began to leave the female. No longer did she welcome his crude advances with her rough but willing response. Now she began to bite and claw at him if he attempted to resume his wooing, and in another week the two became normal animals: friends, but no longer sweethearts.

They remained together for the next four months when it became clear that the tigress was in cub and instinct warned her that the time had come to separate herself from her protector, who would be a danger to her young when they were born. So one day, she broke off her alliance by wandering away on her own to seek some cave at the top of one of the rocky hills in the jungle, where she could litter in peace and bring forth her family.

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Bagh had now developed into a huge and fully grown male, filled with confidence in himself and his strength against any other animal. He stalked the jungles fearlessly, killing and eating where and when he wished. His earlier antagonist, the wild-boar, held no fears for him, for he had learned the method of surprise attack and did not repeat his old mistakes. But he still gave the porcupine a wide berth.

So far, the only creatures he had not attacked were bison and the elephants. These, by their very size, appeared too formidable, though in his greater self-confidence and aggressiveness he decided one day to try conclusions with a bison.

There were several herds of these animals in the region, for the foothills and deep valleys afforded abundant pasture and were traversed by perennial streams that ensured a regular supply of water at all seasons. Bison must have water and plenty of it. They will not

stay in forests where the streams dry up during the hot weather.

These herds numbered from a dozen animals to as many as fifty, each under the leadership of a big bull, assisted by other bulls of almost similar size. Moreover, instinct had taught bison to combine against an attack from a common enemy, and tigers were their only enemies apart from the human race.

So Bagh realised that if he wanted to kill a bison, he would have to pick a female or a calf as prey, and he would have to do the deed where the rest of the bison herd would not know of it, or else the whole group would come down upon him together like a line of charging cavalry.

Soon he located a herd of these animals and hovered on their outskirts for two whole days, hoping to pick up a straggler. Luck came his way on the second day, when he found a female grazing all by herself. Bagh pounced upon her and, in spite of her comparatively great size, was rather surprised at discovering that she fell an easy prey to his skilled onslaught, collapsing beneath him with her neck neatly broken. What Bagh did not realise or know was that she was a comparatively young animal and still immature. After that day, he began to lose his respect for these huge beasts, and with further kills to his credit, he came in time to the conclusion that bison were not to be feared at all.

His attacks upon the herds now increased in number and boldness, and one day he rushed upon a female that was barely a hundred yards from the rest of her grazing companions. As he leapt upon her and seized her throat she just had time to raise a bellow of agony before the sharp crack of her neck proclaimed that she was dead. But that dying cry had carried to the herd and the big bull, who was the leader, recognising that call of distress, ceased browsing and, snorting with rage, galloped to the place from where the cry had come. Some of the younger bulls in the vicinity, also sensing danger and seeing the behaviour of their leader, followed him.

Thus the big bull, and two others almost as large, broke in upon the scene where the female was lying on the ground, the nerves and muscles in her hind legs causing those limbs to twitch, while Bagh sprawled over her, his hold on her throat yet unrelaxed, caught red-handed in his act of slaughter.

He was unaware his felony had been discovered till he heard snorts of rage and the thunder of hooves on the ground. He looked up and there almost in line, were three massive bison bulls bearing down upon him together.

It speaks greatly for his courage and self-confidence that thoughts of flight did not for a moment enter the tiger's mind.

Instead, there was the definite determination to defend his kill. Never for a second did his animal nature allow him to consider that he was the aggressor and that they were justified in their purpose of avenging one of the members of their herd. So he leaped off the carcass and counter-charged, to meet the onrush of the enraged bulls. It was a truly magnificent gesture, but a very foolish one nevertheless. As they were upon him with lowered heads and extended horns, he sprang into the air and on to the back of the biggest bull, the leader. By the very nature of his onslaught, Bagh's head was facing towards the rear of the large bull and he gripped the heaving flanks with all his talons while he bit deeply into the rump. His position for the moment was a lucky one, because the big bull could do nothing about it, nor could his companions.

The bison bellowed with rage and the excruciating pain to which he was being subjected. He halted his mad rush and tossed his head and horns in a vain endeavour to unseat the tiger, while Bagh continued his vicious biting. The other two bulls stopped too and faced their leader, but they did not know what to do, for to attempt to dislodge the tiger with their horns would injure their leader.

The increasing agony he was suffering prompted the bison to run around in circles and dash itself against the boles of neighbouring trees in an attempt to unseat the devil on his back. He could easily have done this had he the sense to fall upon the ground and roll over on his back. But the instinct of wild animals in a fight is to try to remain on their feet.

At last the bull saw a low-hanging bough and dashed beneath it. The bough caught the tiger at its rear and tore it from the bison's back. Bagh fell head over heels to the ground and like lightning, the bison and his two supporters charged upon him simultaneously. The horns of one of the younger bulls got beneath the body of the tiger and by a quick toss of its head, Bagh was thrown into the air, to fall to the ground again with a resounding thud. Another of the bulls ran over him, trampling him with his sharp hooves. And then it was the turn of the big bull to hand out some of the punishment he had been receiving. He butted the tiger before Bagh could regain his feet and his horn passed through the flesh of the tiger's left thigh, making a hole from which the blood spouted. The other two bulls also rushed down upon him and Bagh became the centre of six slashing, probing horns.

He had learned his lesson. Desperately intent only upon escape, Bagh

managed to scramble over the back of one of the bison and dive into the undergrowth. The enraged bulls quickly followed, but their bulk was a disadvantage and prevented them from catching up with the more supple carnivore. Thus he managed to escape.

Bagh nursed his painful wounds, especially the deep hole in his thigh, for seven weeks. Fortunately, the point of the horn had only grazed the main bone without breaking it, and by continuously licking with his rough tongue, Bagh was able to keep his injury clean and free of maggots and the many sources of infection that would have brought about his death.

At last the wound healed, but this incident marked the beginning of a long series of incidents that turned this tiger into a veritable scourge of the region. For Bagh developed a distinct limp in his left hind leg. The limb became stiff and greatly hampered him in his hunting, making it difficult to run down the beasts that hitherto had been such easy prey.

While his leg was healing, Bagh had once again been forced to make do with such emergency rations as the jungle might allow him in the form of crabs and frogs and other moving creatures that could not escape, just as when he recovering from the troublesome wounds inflicted by the porcupine. This time, however, he recovered more quickly, for though the wound made by the enraged bison bull was larger and deeper and had bled far more profusely, at least it had been a clean wound, unlike the smaller but more insidious injuries caused by the quills that had embedded themselves in his flesh.

These two accidents, or perhaps only the second one, made Bagh feel that the world in general was an unfriendly place. Until then, life had been an enchanting experience. He had found happiness in the freedom of the forest where he roamed at will, eating his fill when and where and how he wished; but the bison had changed all this. He knew now that there was a limit to his strength and audacity, and that he could not kill as he pleased. There was resentment in his heart. It smouldered deeply and any provocation could fan it into flame. This happened by chance and very soon.

Bagh was rather thin now and was limping along when he came to a game track leading downhill to a stream. The side of the hill was clothed with bamboos, and it was dark beneath, where the direct rays of sunlight were screened by the leafy stems. Faintly, he heard the crack of a young cane being broken. He slowed his walk at once and fell into his usual cautious hunting prowl, being careful to avoid stepping on any dried leaf or twig that might rustle and betray his presence.

Proceeding thus, Bagh turned a corner where the path circumvented a large clump of bamboo. There he halted in his tracks. Standing on the path with its back to him and playing with the tender shoots of a fallen bamboo branch was a baby elephant. It was obviously a very young animal, for long hair still covered its pinkish-grey, tender skin. The calf began, to squeak and squeal with delight as it struck the stem and attempted to tear off its leaves.

Bagli was hungry, and here was a meal that would fill his stomach for some days at least. Within a few seconds of catching sight of the baby elephant, he was bounding forward. Almost in silence, he sprang upon it and seized its neck. The baby squealed in terror as it sank to the ground with the massive tiger above.

But in his haste, Bagh had forgotten a fundamental fact. Baby elephants do not wander about the jungle on their own. Their mothers are in close attendance. In this case the mother happened to be standing on the other side of the bamboo clump and hence had not been visible to Bagh on the track he was following.

Hearing her baby's cry of alarm, the mother turned around to see a tiger in the act of killing it. Sudden fury shone in her eyes, and with trunk curled inwards she trumpeted shrilly and charged to the rescue of her infant, intent on saving its life.

Worse still for Bagh, the mother and her calf were members of a large herd. Other elephants were grazing in the vicinity and heard the calf's call of distress and its mother's scream of rage. The bulls began trumpeting on all sides as they hurried to the rescue.

Pandemonium broke loose. Bagh released his hold on the calf's throat and raised his head to roar madly, thinking that by doing so he would frighten off the mother. But nothing could stop her charge and, reaching out with her trunk, she seized the tiger around his body and tore him from the calf.

Bagh managed to wriggle free and leap upon the elephant's face, biting savagely at her forehead and digging deeply into the rough hide with his fore-claws in order to keep his hold. The mother, now maddened with pain and fear, tried to dislodge him by brushing her forehead against a bamboo clump where the sharp spikes pierced Bagh's body in all directions.

Just then a big bull elephant arrived on the scene. Unlike the two bison who had not known what to do to assist their lord and master when Bagh had leapt upon his back, this bull was a cleverer creature. Elephants, as everybody knows, have a great deal of intelligence.

He stretched out his trunk and wrenched the tiger off the face of the female. Bagh struggled madly in his grip, while the bull raised him aloft and then dashed him heavily to the ground.

With the breath knocked out of him, the terrified tiger looked up to see the infuriated bull bearing down upon him to trample him to pulp. Close behind the bull was the revengeful mother. They were almost upon him when he staggered to his feet, and with painfully aching ribs, Bagh made a dash for the bamboo clump and thence into the forest.

His mortification was now complete. No longer was he the proud and fearless forest king who had stalked the aisles of the jungle unafraid of any living thing that might move there. His courage had gone. His ego had received a severe blow. He knew now that the mighty bison and the still mightier elephants were his masters in size and strength and he knew the fearless courage with which they defended their families. And lurking still in his subconscious mind was the shameful memory that even the puny porcupine had given him a drubbing. For the first time in his life, Bagh knew fear and with it was born a touch of cowardice. Now he would think twice before he attacked, and he would only tackle such creatures as he knew were quite defenceless.

The first on such a list were the cattle that fed in the village pastures bordering the forest and were brought by their owners into the jungle to graze during the summer months when the grass withered away in the farmsteads and in the nearer fields.

It happened to be summer at this time, and one by one Bagh began to kill and cat the bulls and cows of the herds that driven into the jungle every day. He was still a big and powerful tiger, although considerably cowed by his recent setbacks. The limp in his hind-leg did not prevent him from stalking and finishing off these domestic animals, governed as they were by no instincts of caution as are the regular denizens of the forest.

Then the rains came, and the herds were no longer driven into the jungle. The grass sprouted again in abundance in the many acres of waste land around the little hamlets adjoining the reserved forest where Bagh had his home.

But the tiger's hunger remained and had to be appeased. Besides, he had not only formed a new habit, but he actually liked the taste of raw beef. So he had no alternative but to follow the herds of cattle into the pastures where they browsed, attack and kill them there, and then carry off their carcasses into the security of the jungle where he might be left alone to feed in peace. This was a comparatively simple matter for Bagh, and again he grew very contented with life and the easy way

in which he was procuring his food, plentifully and so often as he wished. Never more would he need to exert himself in stalking and killing the more cunning and elusive animals of the jungle, and there was absolutely no risk of retaliation.

However, the owners of the herds were not happy. In fact they were very upset. The Indian peasant is far from rich, and very often his few cattle are his sole wealth. His capital is not to be counted in cash, but in the fields or the cattle that he might own, and the death of even a calf is a financial blow from which he is slow to recover. When these deaths become frequent and arc caused moreover by the depredations of tiger, the ryot is placed in a desperate situation and feels that God himself has inflicted a severe scourge upon him.

Generally the peasants do nothing but bemoan their sad fate. Occasionally they seek help and beg that the tiger be destroyed. Only very rarely does one of them decide to help himself by trying to kill the oppressor.

But every rule has its exceptions and so it was that Gundappa, a poor herdsman, decided that as nobody had come forward to help him, he would do something himself about putting an end to the tiger. Gundappa had already lost three valuable animals to its voracious appetite -two fine fat cows and a young bull. A further catastrophe of this nature would ruin him.

There were difficulties to overcome, however. In the first place, Gundappa did not possess a gun of any sort. Secondly, poisoning was out of the question as he, a simple villager, could not purchase a sufficient quantity of any of the more efficient poisons for the purpose he had in mind. The sale of such poisons to the public was strictly controlled and required a certificate. Decoctions, made from poisonous leaves and barks, were unlikely to be sufficiently powerful to kill a tiger. Powdered glass was a much-favoured medium, often employed locally by jealous husbands and wives who sought a means to rid themselves of unfaithful spouses. But has would have to be administered in a very large dose to destroy an animal as big as a tiger. He would most certainly become suspicious when eating from a kill that had been treated with powdered glass, quite apart from the quantity required.

The only other possibility was to trap the tiger, but there was no ready-made steel trap in the village and Gundappa felt that to make a wooden trap-cage would not prove successful. The tiger would be too wily to enter it.

He sought advice from village friends and one of them volunteered to borrow a large, steel-jawed trap owned by his cousin who lived in a

village bordering an extension of the forest, about twenty-five miles away. He said he would fetch the contraption provided Gundappa lent him a bullockcart to fetch it, as the trap was very large and heavy. To this the aggrieved herdsman readily consented. If the trap did not actually kill the tiger, they hoped that it would hold him till when the whole village could turn out and slay him with spears and clubs.

None of them were wise enough to foresee a possible alternative, that the tiger might escape, perhaps maimed in some way for life. And none of them even remotely considered the terrible consequences of this. Rather, they all congratulated themselves and each other on what seemed to be the ideal solution to a very knotty problem.

Accordingly, the trap was fetched in the cart. It was a most diabolical contrivance, with huge steel jaws that, when opened to their fullest extent, covered a diameter of nearly a yard and required four men to keep them apart. Eagerly they awaited the moment when the tiger would make his next kill so as to put their fiendish device to the test.

Fortune soon favoured them and so did Bagh. Two days later, he killed a large cow just at the border of the jungle. The conspirators were highly elated. Firstly, the cow did not belong to any of them. Secondly, the tiger had not had time to eat more than a mouthful. They knew the very first thing he would do when he returned to feed, would be to start at the tender udder, which is most favoured by all carnivores, both for its delicate flesh and for the milk which they love to drink.

They set to work, laying the spread jaws of the trap directly over the lower regions of the dead cow, which was lying on its side, and concealing the steel with grass and leaves, after attaching the short length of stout chain to an iron stake. It was hoped that, in reaching for the nether regions of the the cow, tiger would get his head or paw caught in the trap, and that it would hold him firmly while he roared and struggled to escape, till they could come and put an end to him. When they left the carcass that evening, it was with an awareness of having done a very good job.

And they had. Bagh came that night for his feed. He was hungry. Moreover, he remembered he had killed a milking cow. Bagh loved milk. In fact he would have liked to have drunk some of that milk after the killing; but the herdsmen had come to know of his deed when the rest of the cattle in the vicinity had bolted. These herdsmen had stood afar off and shouted and waved their sticks. Some of them had even dared to throw stones. Altogether, it had been too disturbing. So Bagh had dragged the cow away for some distance and concealed it in what he thought had been a safe place, deciding to return that night to drink

the milk and eat the flesh in peace.

But he did not know that the herdsmen had later followed the drag mark left by the carcass and had discovered the place where he had hidden it.

Bagh approached his kill with little caution and gazed at it for a few seconds. Then he walked up to the tempting udder, crouched down on his belly in front of it with the full expectation of having a good drink of milk, stretching his neck forward to bite the soft, white flesh.

At that moment his mouth touched something hard that was covered with grass, and with a snap the teeth of some monster he had never met or seen before fastened themselves on either side of his neck. He roared and roared with pain, anger and fear, struggling desperately and using all four feet to try to rid himself of this dreadful thing that clawed into his flesh.

The spring was powerful, requiring the strength of four to overcome it, but Bagh was much stronger than four men. He fought free within a few minutes, leaving one of his eyes behind him, torn from its socket as the sharp teeth of the trap scraped over his face.

Screaming roars of agony and fear, Bagh fled. Madly he rushed into the jungle; anywhere, so long as he could get away from the intense pain that was torturing him. But from that he could not escape. It was to torment him for many days and many weeks to come.

For the third time, Bagh underwent a period of enforced starvation. Although none of his four legs had been affected, he had lost his left eye entirely, part of his left ear had been torn off, and his face and neck were badly scared, while his upper right canine tooth had been broken in half.

So great is the endurance of the creatures of the wild that the tiger recovered from this affliction just as he had survived his earlier tribulations. Each had taught him a lesson. The encounter with the porcupine had made him cautious about attacking apparently small and defenceless creatures. The bull bison had impressed on him the folly of waging war on heavier creatures, particularly in numbers. The two elephants had very markedly emphasised the earlier lesson. Finally, an obviously dead animal, which he himself had killed earlier in the day, had somehow come to life and succeeded in injuring him severely. Once more the world seemed to him an unkind place, in which he would have to exercise the greatest stealth and caution if he wished to continue to live.

But at the very back of his mind he associated this strange happening with the owner of the dead cow.

While he was convalescing, Bagh was forced to go back to his diet of such small creatures as he could capture. This did not last for long, for he was still a young and healthy animal; but it lasted long enough to cause him to lose Something of his sleek appearance. And the scars on his face, accentuated by the missing left eye, as well as the torn ear and broken tooth combined to give him a diabolical appearance. The once beautiful and all-powerful Bagh now looked a veritable fiend, ugly and deformed.

Time soon showed that this tiger not only looked a devil incarnate, but had actually become one. This beautiful Creature had now become a skulking, cunning and frustrated beast, bent only upon destruction, a quick meal, and an equally quick escape in order to repeat the deed in safer regions further away.

The climax to these events occurred very soon after the accident, even before Bagh had completely recovered from his wounds. Because he was able to hunt only the smaller creatures, that were quite insufficient in number and size to fill his belly, he was desperately hungry as one noon-day he slunk along a forest-line that divided the jungles on the north from the village fields to the south.

Noon is not the normal time of day for a tiger to be out hunting. Ordinarily he should be fast asleep beside some forest rill, digesting the heavy meal he had eaten the night before. But alas, those good days had become a thing of the past. Bagh still possessed the strength, but his prowess in hunting had largely gone, due to his dragging hind-leg and the fact that he now had only one eye. Most of all, his self-confidence had gone, and his whole being showed a hunted, furtive look.

So he was hungry, desperately hungry, and even the stiffing heat of noon did not keep him in the cool shadows until the sun sank in the west and the approach of evening, when the killers of the night would waken lazily and stretch contentedly in preparation for the hours of hunting. But this particular killer could not wait till then; he was too hungry.

From a great distance, Bagh heard the sound - the hollow of the wooden blocks strung around the necks of bulls and cows that had been sent out to graze, herd was being driven along the fire-line, probably to the small pool called Dassamcheruvu, situated some six furlong away and just within the forest to the north of the fire-line. The crude wooden 'bells' were intended to assist the herdsmen in locating

their charges once they entered the jungle thickets, where they might be difficult to find. The hollow sound of the wooden clappers striking against each other might, moreover, deter any carnivore from attacking, and that would normally have been the case.

But this was an exception. Bagh was ravenously hungry. The saliva dribbled from his half-open jaws; he panted with the heat, obsessed as he was with the one idea of putting something inside the empty, longing cavern that was his belly.

He came out on the fire-line at the rear of the herd and perhaps a furlong away. They had just topped a rise in the ground and were descending on the further side. Bagh could not see them, but the rhythmic knocking of the 'bells' continued to assure him that they were still moving forwards. Bagh followed.

When he in turn topped the rise, the cattle had reached a level piece of ground and were walking in a knot away from him. He observed with relief that there appeared to be just one human being in charge and that individual only a small one.

The herdsman was, in fact, a mere boy of twelve years. The adult who had been sent out with the cattle had fallen asleep in the shade of a large banyan tree and had instructed the boy to drive the cattle to the pool, Dassamcheruvu, and there water them and graze them near the fire-line for an hour or so, after which he was to drive them back to the banyan tree and awaken the sleeper, who would take them to the village.

He did not know if he would have the courage to leap down upon one of the animals. But he clambered up the rock and took his position of ambush, lying prone on the top. He found the stone uncomfortably hot from the blazing sunshine that fell directly upon it; so much so that he was compelled to raise his belly slightly off the rock to keep it from direct contact with the surface, distributing the weight of his body over his four legs that were drawn in below him.

Soon he heard the cattle coming. Then the leading animal appeared, a tall and rather stringy bull with long horns that almost met at their tips and would be quite useless as weapons. The rest of the herd followed closely. The path was rather narrow here, and the animals stumbled and jostled against each other in their haste to reach the water. None seemed inclined to give way to a neighbour and they lurched forwards in a compact mass, the blocks of wood suspended from their necks striking together, and their hooves striking against each other and the rock. A cloud of dust arose above their sweating backs, hanging like a pall over the moving beasts.

Very soon the main body of the herd had passed on. A few stragglers brought up the rear. These consisted of two quite different sorts; those who were sickly and emaciated and could not keep pace with the rest, and one or two females in calf. At the end came a young cow, heavily pregnant. Her calf would be born in a day or two. Behind her strode the lone boy in charge of the cattle, taking big steps and trying to keep his feet within the sandals that were obviously several sizes too large for him. No doubt he had stealthily borrowed them from the sleeper beneath the banyan tree, but with the full intention of returning them, just as stealthily, when he got back and before the owner awakened. For there were many thorns on the ground, and the baked earth was hot beneath the midday sun. Ramu, the boy, felt perfectly justified in taking the sandals surreptitiously, for he knew he was doing the sleeper a great favour by consenting to drive the herd to the pool. The sandals would have been refused anyhow, had he asked for them honestly. Resting across his shoulder, and supported at either end by his raised hands, was the usual five-foot staff, the emblem and sole protection of the grazier in India. The elder herdsman had lent him the stick before going off to sleep.

The pregnant cow came along and was almost below Bagh. Nearly every animal in front had passed around a bend in the pathway. The cattle-boy was quietly humming the tune 'Gori Gori' to himself. It was quite new, so far as Indian music went, and he had heard it recently at a village travelling-cinema that had come to the town of Thali where he had gone to buy the month's supplies for his parents.

A few seconds more and the pregnant cow would have passed out of range of a direct leap. The recollection of his recent experience and a latent fear of human beings, represented by the twelve-year-old boy, waged a tremendous conflict against the pangs of hunger within the terribly-scarred head.

Hunger won!

Like a bolt from the blue, the tiger descended from above, his massive weight landing heavily upon the back of the already burdened cow. She collapsed. And before she knew quite what was happening, a powerful jaw seized her throat from behind. She struggled to her feet, and that was her undoing.

Retaining his hold upon her throat with his enormous fangs, and grasping her shoulders with the claws of his forepaws, the tiger slipped his weight to her right side. The weight, combined with her own, caused her to heel over and crash to the ground.

As she did so there was a sharp cracking sound, like a stout stick

being broken. Bagh had used his own and the cow's weight to break her neck.

Ramu, still humming 'Gori Gori' to himself, almost collided with the stricken cow, sprawled upon the pathway before him with the tiger on top. Halting in his tracks, he swung his staff in a semi-circle.

It was a thoughtless gesture, made no doubt in self-defence and with no intention of intimidating or striking the tiger.

But Bagh was all worked-up by now. The taste of fresh hot blood, the still-quivering carcass below him, that silly puny little creature behind, threatening his rear with its insignificant stick, the fact that at the last moment it might do something to deprive him of his hard-won prey when he was so very, very hungry, all combined to irritate and excite him beyond the limits of caution.

Momentarily releasing his hold on the cow's throat, the tiger turned around and swung a terrific blow at the boy's head. There was a loud thud as Ramu's skull cracked like an eggshell.

Even as he fell dead, Bagh turned about again and grasped the cow's throat once more. Instinct told him that it might still be alive and escape. He was determined not to allow this to happen.

The cattle in front, hearing the scuffle and sensing danger, galloped unheeding past the pool and scattered in the jungle.

Bagh still held on to the throat of the motionless cow. After a minute or two, he grew calmer. Then he released the throat and stood erect to regard the fine kill he had made. It would provide him with at least three square meals.

But he was worried. What of that small man-creature that lay behind? He had seen many human beings before and always avoided them - because he had been afraid of them. In his undeveloped brain, he faintly connected the trap with human agency, and he retained a healthy respect for the whole race, which he thought capable of great power to harm him. Could he have been mistaken all these years? Was a single blow of his paw sufficient to lay a human being low? Could it be true that, after all, it was easier for him to kill one of these two legged creatures than any four-legged beast? It seemed unbelievable! It had certainly required a much greater effort on his part to kill the cow that now lay dead beneath him.

And if that were so, was a man as good to eat? Hardly likely he thought. But then again, it might be so. Perhaps by mere luck, he had stumbled upon a fresh source of food.

Bagh was doubtful and he was also very hungry. So he crouched behind the rear of the cow, bit off its tail to allow more space, and then bit deep into the rectum, tearing out a large chunk of flesh. Into the jagged aperture he had thus made, from which blood began to trickle, Bagh inserted his right forepaw He groped inside with his claws and drew out a mass of lower intestine. Groping again, he continued to clean out the offending portions of the dead cow, including its stomach. This mess he dragged some few feet away and then settled down behind the carcass of the cow to begin his meal.

As he did so, his yellow-green eyes gazed over the arched side of his victim and caught sight of the corpse of the herdboy just beyond. Once again came the awareness of the ease with which he had killed this puny creature, and once again the temptation to taste of its flesh. Bagh hesitated a few seconds while he deliberated whether to start on the cow before him or the boy just beyond. The temptation to sample that strange meat grew stronger.

He stepped over the carcass of the cow and walked up to his second victim.

It was a comparatively small 'kill', and the urge first to remove the intestines and stomach, as he had done with the cow, did not seem to impel the tiger in this instance. Perhaps the shape of the human corpse had something to do with it.

Bagh lowered his head and sniffed the torso of the dead boy. He wanted to give it a final examination, Then he sniffed the throat and lingered there.

The grazier had been naked except for a loin-cloth. One end of this flapped in the breeze and annoyed the tiger. With a low, vicious growl, Bagh seized it between his teeth and tugged sharply. The cloth was tied in a knot and tended to resist his efforts. This angered him. Growling again, he began to worry at it until he succeeded in biting through the material and removing it entirely from the boy's loins.

The next second, Bagh bit deeply into the boy's genitals and tore out a mouthful, which he gulped down. Then he settled on the ground, a paw over the carcass, and began to eat methodically from the chest and stomach.

At that moment, this carcass simply represented another meal for a hungry tiger; but in reality it was a milestone in his career.

For a man-eater had been created; a scourge that was to account for the lives of four scores of human beings, and that would make people

dread to allude to him as 'the tiger' for fear that the evil spirit that is believed to ride upon the backs of all man-eating tigers to guide them to their human prey might overhear and seek the speaker as the next victim. Over their smoky fires, people would speak of him in whispers as 'the Maharajah', behind the barricaded doors of their huts and in the silent watches of the night, while they listened to his moaning call floating over the dark labyrinths of the forest.

Bagh made a good meal of the grazier. He had not been a very big boy, but Bagh was a very large tiger and a very hungry one besides. When he rose from the carcass at last, with the intention of going down to the pool for a drink of water, there was not much left of the boy but his head and parts of the four limbs.

Meanwhile, the herd had instinctively gathered together again within the precincts of the jungle where they had galloped in disorder. They wandered about for some time and then came upon one of the many pathways made by themselves and other cattle over the years. This they followed and in due course emerged on the forest-line that separated the jungle from the fields. In a body they crossed the line, reached the fields, and began to wander towards the village that crested a neighbouring low hillock.

When the animals arrived home without their attendants, much surprise was expressed at their non-appearance. Also indignation and abuse. Were they not both careless and irresponsible to have deserted their charges like this and wandered off on their own? The cattle were valuable property, while the man and the boy were not, and the owner determined to give them both a good beating when at last they turned up; there would be no dinner that night and they would be fined three days' wages.

The elder herdsman, who lay beneath the banyan tree, continued to sleep blissfully till the sun began to sink towards the west and the evening shadows lengthened. Then he awoke, sat up, yawned, stretched his arms and for some time wondered how he had come to fall asleep. At last, he remembered. What on earth could have become of the herd and that young rascal to whom he had entrusted it? No doubt the imp had forgotten all about him. More likely still, he had felt too lazy to drive the animals all the way back to the banyan tree and had driven them straight to the village instead. The lazy young hound!

The man rose to his feet with the intention of setting off to the village.

Suddenly he remembered his sandals, or 'chappals' as they are better known. He had placed them by his side before he fell asleep. Now they were not to be found. Surely the boy, Ramu, must have put them on,

and that without his permission, when he had driven the herd to the water-hole, Damn the impudent brat! Just wait till he saw him. Govind, the herdsman, would teach him such a lesson!

With these indignant thoughts, the apprehensive grazier started barefoot towards the village. The adjman - or owner - must not come to know about his having gone to sleep, leaving the herd to the boy. If he did, he would probably beat him, or fine him, or both. So he quickened his steps, hoping to reach the village and warn Ramu not to tell. Incidentally, he decided he would cuff the young rascal and eat up his dinner that night. On the other hand, he might have to let him off, provided he promised not to sneak!

When he arrived at the owner's hut, Govind was dismayed to find the cattle already kraaled. Also a very irate adjman, who abused him in no unmeasured terms. 'Son of a fallen mother,' he shouted, 'where have you been all this time? And where is the boy? Little wonder is it that neither of you know your own fathers when you cannot be relied upon to look after my cattle. The young brown pregnant cow is missing! Perhaps she has calved somewhere and has stayed with her calf. Or she may have been killed by a wild beast or stolen by these accursed Lambani gypsies. Go and find her.'

The owner's voice rose to a frenzy, in keeping with his rising indignation. 'Go and find her, I say. And if any harm has come to her, I will flay you alive and throw your illegitimate remains to the jackals - that is, if the jackals would deign to touch them!'

The herdsman had no reply. Vaguely he began to feel that something had gone wrong. Besides, it would soon be dark, and this opulent pig was ordering him to go into the jungle to search for the missing cow. It was a wonder that he had not been asked to find the missing boy as well. Night would soon fall, when the wild beasts would emerge from their lairs. Fancy asking him to go at such a time and search for a beastly cow! That was the trouble with these moneyed men. They were so unreasonable and selfish. They thought only of themselves and their property. Who would care for a poor man like him, anyhow?

With these misgivings, and the seeds of rebellion in his heart, the grazier made his way back to the forest-line. Then his misgivings grew and turned to fear. There was now no room in his mind for rebellion. For it began to fill, increasingly as the purple shades of a tropic evening spread among the sombre, silent trees, with fear - fear that made him so nervous that he stared hard into each bush he passed. If only he could avoid entering the forest!

And then a thought occurred to him. Perhaps that little imp had carried

out his instructions to take the herd to water at the Dassamcheruvu pool. If so, they would have passed this way. He sank down on his haunches the better to study the dry ground in the fading light.

Yes, indeed; the herd had passed. Quite unmistakably, he could discern the marks of the beasts on the hard earth. The cattle had been driven to the pool after all. But where, in Krishna's name, had the brown cow and the boy gone? Anyway, the pool was near and Govind decided to go that far but no farther. Perhaps the wretched boy had fallen asleep beside the water, though that would not account for the absence of the pregnant cow.

And so he came to pass under the same rock upon which Bagh had crouched a few hours before. He looked and froze in his tracks. Before him lay the dead cow; but closer still, almost at his feet, were the few scant and scattered remains of what, till so recently, had been the boy Ramu.

Govind's mental processes were not normally very agile, but it slowly dawned upon him that this was the work of some wild animal. What other animal could it have been but a tiger? And moreover, that very same tiger might be lurking nearby. Indeed, at any moment it might leap upon him and kill him. Govind turned and fled.

Nor did he once stop running till he burst into the enclosure bordering the adjman's house and fell prostrate at the latter's feet, gasping for breath.

The adjman saw him, recognised at once that something was radically wrong, thought only of his fat young cow and bawled the question, "What has happened, you fool? Tell me, quickly!'

But words would not form on Govind's lips till the owner shouted again, 'Speak, idiot, before I thrash you!'

Then the dreadful news tumbled from Govind's lips, 'Master, she has been killed; and Ramu, too, by a great tiger. I saw it. It tried to kill me. It has a head so big,' and here he stretched out both arms with hands apart to indicate the size of the tiger's head which, had his gesture been correct, would have been over four feet from ear to ear. 'Not only has the tiger killed them both, but it has eaten up Ramu completely.'

The adjman was too stunned to reply for a moment. Then he asked in a tremulous voice, 'Are you certain the cow is dead?'

And so it was that Bagh became known as one of that band of the

most dreaded of all jungle creatures, a man-eating tiger!

Thereafter, men and women began to disappear in slow succession from the hamlets in the vicinity, and from the small villages bordering the jungle up to twenty miles away. The incidents were few and far between at first, so that six months and more passed before the people of the area began to realise that man-eater was operating in their midst. For in India, people disappear, and it is not always that they have come to an Untimely end. Some incur huge debts, beyond their wildest hopes of ever being able to repay. If they remain, the creditors will catch and beat them, or perhaps they will be compelled to work out a term of menial service in compensation. Sometimes a man meets a woman of another caste whom he can never hope to marry legally; or perhaps another man's wife. Inter-caste marriages are taboo, and there is no such thing as divorce. So the lovers just fade away from the scene and start life afresh far away, where they are unknown. Or may be a man has quarrelled with his wife or his parents; he does not wish to continue living in such uncongenial circumstances. Suicide is the first thought, but it takes a brave person to end his or her own life; disappearance overnight is a much simpler and more attractive alternative.

For all these reasons and many more, men, and more rarely women, do disappear from their villages and nobody worries about it, except perhaps those very few people who are directly connected. So when Bagh began to kill and his victims vanished, no one cared over much till, as had happened with the boy Ramu, the remains were found and it was confirmed that the killer was a tiger - not just an ordinary tiger, but a man-eater! Then panic spread from village to village.

Nobody thereafter would venture alone into the jungle. The doors of the mud and wattle huts in the villages bordering the forest were barricaded at night. All cattle-grazing and wood-felling operations ceased. Those who had to travel moved only by day and in large groups. Poachers who had been busy every night with their muzzle-loading guns, hiding near fields of grain or beside water-holes and salt-licks, to slay the unwary deer that visited such places, gave up their meat diet for the time being and became strict vegetarians. The fields allowed to lie uncared-for, because for the most part they lay very near the jungle, whence the man-eater might suddenly emerge, to fall an unsuspecting person.

The weeks dragged by. As the people inhabiting the hamlets within the twenty-mile range where Bagh first began to kill human beings became more and more cautious, he began to find it increasingly difficult to procure his victims. This had a double result: he grew bolder and he

started to wander further afield. The cause and effect factors with maneating tigers and panthers always run in a vicious circle, each influencing the other. In this case, just over a year had elapsed since the boy Ramu had been the first victim, but in this time Bagh had accounted for twenty-seven men, women and children, and the terror of his presence was acutely felt over some 400 square miles of jungle and sparsely inhabited territory.

Conditions resembling a siege prevailed in the tiny villages throughout the area. The people locked themselves indoors at five o'clock and remained there till eight in the morning. As most village families are very large, consisting of three generations of persons, and many at that, while no sanitary arrangements of any sort exist, it can be imagined to what state of filth the interior of each dwelling was reduced before the morning dawned.

During this period a number of attempts were made to eliminate the tiger. His kills had been poisoned with arsenic, strychnine and cyanide, but he never ate the poison. A couple of hunters had sat up for him on a machan and fired at his skulking form but had missed. These happenings, together with his earlier experiences, made the tiger more wary than ever. He never returned to any of his kills, animal or human, nor did he show himself at any time. The only evidence of his continued presence were his tracks on the by-paths leading from the forest, and the fact that people continued to disappear with certain regularity. The months rolled by. The menace Continued. It seemed as if the man-eater had come to stay.

Hunters continued to sit up for him at night; traps were laid; home-made bombs were ingeniously hidden inside his kills; trap-guns were set along the narrow paths he sometimes followed; poison was used freely; but Bagh, the man-eater continued to slay and never returned to an old kill. He seemed indestructible.

Thc sun was near setting when a long man walked down the centre of the forest-line which separated jungle from fields. Nobody else was near, for it was evening and everyone knew that the 'Maharajah', as Bagh was now universally called, frequently haunted this route in his search for human beings.

Was the man mad? Perhaps he did not know that there was a man-eater about!

But this was unlikely. Someone must have told him! Also the man did not behave like a lunatic, for he seemed to be aware of the danger that threatened him. He walked very slowly and cautiously, keeping to the very centre of the fireline and glancing carefully around at each step.

Obviously he was afraid, for with his eyes he appeared to examine every bush before he drew level with it and looked very frequently behind him.

Now and again a rock, a large tree, or a particularly dense thicket or patch of grass would border the fire-line. As he came abreast of such places, the man moved even more slowly and cautiously, keeping as much as possible to the far side of the fire-line.

He walked some distance in this fashion. Then he looked at his wrist watch. The time was a little after six o'clock. He turned to go back. Ignorant or mad, that man knew he could not see when it became really dark and that he should return before then.

The man had retraced his steps perhaps half-a-furlong when suddenly he stopped dead. Something seemed to worry him, a particularly large clump of grass to his left. Perhaps he sensed danger or heard a noise. He stared hard at the grass.

There came the faintest of rustics and the grass parted, to reveal the snarling visage of Bagh, hideous in his ugliness. The head was at ground-level, for the tiger was about to spring.

The man halted. he raised his gun to his shoulder. Two loud reports shattered the stillness of twilight and the feline roared.

The striped body rolled forward of its own impetus, kicked and clawed the ground frantically in a circle for half-a-minute, and then lay still. The son of Timor the great, and of Seeta, dead!

A little later the man went up to the beast he had shot. He noted the missing left eye, the torn ear, the horribly-scarred face, and wondered why human beings could be so stupid as to do these things that would later become the cause of so much trouble to others, if not themselves.

Bagh, the 'Maharajah', was dead at last; but the man who had killed him could not help feeling a little sympathy for the creature he had been forced to slay.

6 The Villain of Windy Valley

There is a stretch of country in the Kollegal Taluk of Coimbatore district where a strange, and to me undeniably pleasant, phenomenon takes place almost every night of the year, summer or winter, be the weather dry or squally. This strange occurrence begins almost punctually at 10 pm, and ceases as abruptly at three in the morning.

The occurrence to which I refer is a strong breeze, reaching almost to the proportions of a mild gale, that blows from west to east, descending violently in the manner of an approaching storm from the cold heights of the Biligiri-Rangan Mountains to the west, better known as the Blue Hills of Ranga, and sweeping across a wide plain of jungle, roadway and cultivated land, to be lost again in mountains and more jungles in the valley of the Cauvery River, far to the east.

'What's so strange about a breeze?' you may ask. Well, for one thing, you can almost set your watch by its beginning or its end. Secondly, imagine an all-pervading stillness over hill and dale, forest and plain, suddenly shattered each night at a fixed time by a wail that rises to a howl. Then the wind is upon you. It blows and blows for five hours, then ceases almost abruptly, as if at the turn of a switch, at the end of that time. The singularity of the phenomenon has to be experienced to be believed.

No doubt there is a natural explanation, but I do not know it. Yet it is a wonderful experience, welcomed by the weary hunter, hot and tired, after trekking miles all day in the scorching heat.

No doubt our Villain thought this too, for he settled down in Windy Valley, in the forests at the foot of the Biligiri-Rangan Mountains to the west, from where he practised his villainy throughout a wide area, not only during the hours when the gale reigned supreme, but at all times of the night and day, whenever he got the chance.

This villain was a tiger, as you must have guessed by now, and the locale of this story, a region in the district of Coimbatore measuring roughly fifty-five miles from the outskirts of Kollegal town in the north to the Dimbum escarpment further south, and about the same distance between the Blue Hills of Ranga to the west across flat jungle and plain, and then through very rugged hilly country, eastwards, to the Cauvery River.

In the centre of this flat region, situated between forest land to the west and cultivated areas to the east, are the two villages of Lokkanahalli

and Bailur. The first is seventeen miles south of Kollegal, and the second a further sixteen miles or so south of Lokkanahalli. These villages are in the midst of the domain of the nightly squalls, and around and between them the tiger began his career of misdeeds, and there they ended ultimately when he paid the penalty.

The villain was born on the high ranges to the west. At the top of this chain of mountains, at about 5,000 feet, are a number of coffee-estates, founded years ago by a great English sportsman who carved them out of the heart of primeval forest land and converted them into some of the most profitable vested interests in Southern India. In those days the jungle teemed with game; elephant, bison, tiger, panther and deer of all varieties. The last mentioned were so abundant that the carnivore had more than enough to eat, and confined themselves almost exclusively to a diet of venison and wild-pig.

Then came civilization. Forests were felled ruthlessly, roads appeared, with the inevitable automobile, the jeep, the flashlight and prolific poaching by day and night. Deer were slaughtered in hundreds, and with their decimation the natural prey of the wild beasts became increasingly scarce.

Along with the clearing of the forests and the building of roads, greater areas of grassland cropped up, attracting vast herds of domestic cattle and buffaloes. Necessity has always been the mother of invention, and with the advent of these domestic herds, the tigers and panthers for miles around, who until then had only rarely turned to cattle-lifting, became confirmed beef-eaters, killing a deer as seldom now as they had killed a cow or a buffalo in days gone by.

Sholaga aborigines, living in hamlets on the outskirts of the estate, frequently reported that they found the pug-marks of a tigress, accompanied by a half-grown cub, along the footpaths and old game-trails that covered the region. The tracks of the two beasts were found early in the morning, while Other Sholagas returning late in the evenings said that they observed the pug-marks of mother and son superimposed on the trail of hooves left in the sand by their domestic cattle and buffaloes as they were driven home at sundown.

This meant that the two tigers were more or less unaccustomed to beef, but were also mustering the courage to try some.

The desire found its attainment sooner than expected, and in full measure, when in a few weeks, domestic bulls, cows and buffaloes, in increasing numbers, began to fall prey to the two tigers.

With no restraint upon their activities, these animals Worked together

as a team, hunting, killing and eating in unison.

In the course of time the male cub - shortly to be nicknamed by the frightened Sholagas as 'the villain' - grew in size and skill. Perhaps the meat afforded by the single victim that his mother and he brought down together proved insufficient for both. Maybe he wanted to show off his own prowess. Whatever the reason, the young tiger started to kill separately and thereafter did most of the killing himself, allowing his mother a morsel here and there for old times' sake.

All this while he was still growing, and when he reached full maturity, he soon forgot his obligations to the mother who, in any case, was not as big as himself and could no longer exercise her authority over him. He snarled and bit if she dared to approach the kill he had made.

This change in the attitude of her offspring forced the tigress to hunt for herself, which she was well able to do, being but middle-aged and physically very capable. The death-roll now inflicted on the domestic herds of the Sholagas became double what it had been before.

These continued depredations at last aroused the anger of the local people to the extent that they determined to do something about them. Being skilled in jungle-craft for countless generations, the Sholagas knew all about the habits of the animals in their forests and soon thought out a clever way to destroy their oppressors.

With the advice and active assistance of an aged expert who lived in the village of Lokkanahalli at the foot of the mountain range, the hill-men who had come down to consult manufactured a crude bomb, the destructive power of which lay in the chunks of iron and lead that were packed within it. This roughly-made missile they treasured carefully till the right moment presented itself.

The moment came at last after nine more of their cattle had fallen to the two tigers. Victim number ten, thought to have been killed by the young tiger who was regarded as the more destructive of the two marauders, turned out to be exactly the type of victim that the scheming bomb-makers had been waiting for all this time. It was a fine, fat milking cow in her prime!

Her owners, the three enterprising herdsmen who had been with their cattle when the beasts stampeded as the tiger launched itself upon the cow, had run together to the scene of the killing. There they saw a large tigress crouched beside the body of her new kill. Yelling and brandishing their staves, the three Sholagas very pluckily tried to beat off the killer.

Taken aback by the charging men the tigress lost her nerve, panicked and leaped into the undergrowth, disappearing from view. Two of the herdsmen remained with the carcass to protect it against the return of the killer by daylight, while the third Sholaga hastened to tell the bomb-makers of what had happened.

Chuckling with pleasure, the demolition squad hurried with their contraption to where the young cow was lying. Yes indeed, they agreed, after glancing briefly at the victim, nothing could be better. A milking cow was just what was wanted to bring their clever plan into execution. Their long wait had been rewarded.

Deftly they slit the udder, from which the milk spurted, forced the bomb that was as large as a cricket ball inside, and started to sew it up again with needle and thread. They finished at last and felt they had done a good job.

The tigress bit the udder and the home-made bomb, unlike most home-made fireworks, that fail when pressed into service, exploded with devastating effect. It blasted the jaws of the tigress apart, leaving a gaping hole where snout and nostrils had been before, but failed to kill the poor beast outright.

The stricken tigress could not roar and it was reported that horrible gurgling sounds issued from her mangled face and head for the next three days, while she covered the bushes and the jungle grass, wherever she staggered, with gouts of blood. On the fourth day the hideous noises and groans faded to silence. Mercifully, the tigress was dead.

Two days later, vultures circled the sky and the rattling sound of the air passing through their pinions as they plummeted to earth caused the Sholagas to watch and to discover the whereabouts of the decomposing body. The jungle men found the carcass, only to realise that it was the tigress and not the young male that had been done to death by their ingenious bomb.

Perhaps the tiger had been with his mother when the bomb had burst in her mouth. He must have seen or heard her during the three days of her agony. What is certain is that he became exceedingly crafty after that event. He rarely showed himself, slaying only isolated cattle or buffaloes that were grazing on the outskirts of a herd or had fallen to the rear. And when he killed, he gulped as much as possible of his victim there and then, and never returned for a second meal.

Necessarily, these hurriedly-eaten meals, during which the tiger was constantly on guard against the unexpected return of the herdsmen,

were insufficient to satisfy his hunger completely. And because he never returned to finish his meal, he was never full or satisfied. This forced him to hunt and to kill more frequently, exacting a heavier toll on the herds of the surrounding Sholaga hamlets.

A few sporadic attempts were made by local Nimrods, armed with muzzle-loading weapons, to rid the region of the wily and unwelcome visitor, but the greater the efforts to circumvent him, the craftier he became and he seemed to develop brain as farseeing and as cunning as those of any of the hunters who tried to encompass his end.

Not only would he never return to a kill, but he carefully avoided touching any live-bait tied out for him. He slipped out of every 'beat' that was attempted. Instead of running away, he would charge the line of beaters, roaring at full pitch, to send them scuttling up the nearest trees.

Soon people wagged their heads and named him 'the Villain' - 'thrithoo pulli', in the Tamil dialect, and 'badmash bagh' in Hindustani - both terms signifying that the tiger was a rascal of the worst kind. But withal he remained a cattle-lifter and had not harmed a single human up to this stage of his story.

So it came about that, except for his increasing nuisance to the Sholagas living at the summit of the mountain range and amidst the coffee estates, no one worried unduly about 'the Villain' and the authorities did not even notice his existence. Or so it was until the rains came!

With the advent of the south-west monsoon, the storm clouds banked and broke against the towering slopes, discharging their contents in unremitting torrential downpours. It grew bitterly cold and almost continuous drizzling rain, accompanied by a heavy blanket of mist, enveloped the higher ranges. The Sholagas remained in their huts and kept their cattle with them.

All these things caused the Villain to become morose and restless, till he eventually decided to leave his old habitat. He was cold, he was wet, and he was very hungry indeed.

So he came down from the mountains along a track that brought him to the main road about mid-way between the two hamlets of Lokkanahalli and Bailur, and to the region of the indy Valley.

Sheltered by the range to the west, the monsoon was less severe there; the fog and the cold were absent, and best of all the local people did not lock themselves and their cattle indoors and were not aware of

the fate that threatened them.

The Villain began to kill with his accustomed stealth. As the herds here were far more numerous than on the mountain tops, he waxed fat and sleek and contented. Very soon he forget his childhood home.

But over-indulgence and obesity in animals, as with human beings, bring their retribution. The tiger became lazy and overconfident in his attacks on the cattle and departed from his former cautious, ways. Why waste good food, he thought, when unable to stuff himself further. He would return and finish what was left the next night.

The Sholagas of the plains, who had heard from their kinsmen in the hills of the activities of a very cunning tiger, soon became aware that if this was the same animal, it had changed its habits radically; alternatively, this was quite another beast. Anyway, the tiger grew increasingly bold.

Among the Sholagas was a villager named Mariken, who had a single-barrelled .12 shotgun all his own. Many of his neighbours had muzzle-loading weapons, a few under licence and the majority without, but Mariken's gun was a breech-loader and fully licensed! This gave him an exalted status in the field of sport, and thus was thrust upon him the responsibility for eliminating the menace that had come to afflict the cattle-men.

The nightly wind was blowing with full force and heavy rain clouds scudded across the midnight sky, when Mariken sat huddled with a friend on a machan overlooking the half-consumed carcass of a white and brown bull, the pride of a herd of some half-a-hundred animals owned by the patel, or headman, of Lokkanahalli.

But for the fact that the patel was a man of importance, Mariken would never have allowed himself to be coerced into such an unenviable position, for he was strictly a hunter of feathered game and rabbits. The only large animal he had ever shot was a sambar doe that had been pursued by a pack of wild dogs two years before. The hind had sought refuge from her relentless foes by dashing into the shallow lake just beyond the outskirts of the village. Boys had come running to Mariken to tell him of the sambar's predicament and he had forthwith gone and shot the poor beast.

The patel had insisted that Mariken should avenge his bull. Mariken in turn had pleaded indisposition - a severe stomach ache, he said. But the patel insisted.

Thus he had been thrust into the machan on a most inclement night.

He might have avoided the situation by agreeing to lend his gun to a more willing hunter, but such a step could not be considered. He cursed the patel, the tiger, the wind and the weather, as he awaited the coming of the tiger and the heavy downpour that threatened at any minute.

They arrived together - the tiger and the rain! Mariken could hear the great cat crunching the bones of his victim below despite the pattering of the raindrops on the leaves, and the howling crescendo of the night wind as it tossed the treetops to and fro in wild confusion. The night was as black as pitch.

Mariken would have been wise, and incidentally would have saved many human lives, had he followed his inclination, which was to do nothing, as he could not see the tiger. But his Companion kept prodding him in the ribs. Mariken knew that if he did not at least fire a shot, this wretched individual would tell the whole village the next day. They would make fun of him and say he had been too scared to shoot! So he did the only possible thing under the circumstances. He pointed his weapon into the darkness beneath him, in the general direction of the sound of crunching bones, and fired.

The mighty roars that followed, accompanied by the sound of a large beast floundering about, threshing the bushes, made clear to the scared men on the tree that at least one of the chance shots had taken effect and that the tiger was wounded. The noises died away eventually, but the hunters had to endure the bitter cold and driving rain until daylight, when they clambered down from the tree and hastened to tell the people of Lokkanahalli that the tiger had been accounted for.

A large party came back to the spot to search for the dead body. Mariken assured them it must be lying somewhere near.

But nothing could they find, while the continuous rain of the night before had washed away most of the blood trail, except for a smear on the underside of a leaf here and there.

No more cattle were killed after that for a full six weeks. This caused the herdsmen of Bailur and Lokkanahalli to rejoice exceedingly and an appreciative patel gave Mariken a handsome reward of ten rupees.

Then a Sholaga woman on the mountain top, who had gone out to cut a bundle of the long bison-grass that grows prolifically on the higher ranges, outside the coffee-estates, failed to return for her mid-day meal. Her relatives went looking for her in the afternoon. Eventually they located the grass she had cut and collected, and not far away her

scythe, but of her there was absolutely no trace whatever. Due to the long grass, no tracks of any kind were visible, while a close search failed to reveal any blood-marks or other tell-tale evidence.

This was followed in a fortnight by the disappearance of a young man returning from work on one of the coffee-estates. A search for him the next day showed he had been ambushed by a tiger while traversing a gully. The animal had sprung down upon him from a bank, and had then carried him along the gully and up a game-path leading into a dense shola. The searchers were afraid to follow the tiger's trail, indicated here and there by dried drops of blood that had fallen from the victim, into the shola that stretched down a sloping valley, almost to the foot of the range. So this lad's body, too, was never found.

The third would-be victim was luckier and lived to tell the tale. He had been sitting with his back to a tree, his herd of buffaloes grazing around him, when a snort of alarm from one of the bulls had attracted his attention. The boy looked up and noticed the buffaloes were extremely excited. They were gathered in a bunch, facing and gazing intently into the thicket of wattle that reached almost to the spot where he was seated.

Having heard of the disappearance of the Sholaga woman and of the recent death of the young man in the jaws of a tiger, the herd-boy became alarmed. He sensed his danger and started scrambling up the tree behind him. He had scarcely ascended a few feet when a tiger rushed out of the wattle below and reached up to drag him down.

Fortunately, the herd of buffaloes, thoroughly alerted by now, observed the intruder, and, in the manner of buffaloes bred in the jungle, charged the tiger in a body. Hearing the Pounding of many hooves behind him, the tiger saw his Predicament and leaped back into the cover of the wattle and disappeared.

With this third incident, the Sholagas realised that the greatest scourge of the Indian jungles was now upon them. A man-eating tiger! They knew that many of them would not live to see its eventual destruction, for they themselves would be killed before that happened. And with typical eastern fatalism they accepted their doom.

Meanwhile, to the foot of the mountain range, to the villages of Bailur and Lokkanahalli and their neighbouring hamlets, came information of the latest happenings, carried by breathless runners from the mountain-top. The people of the plains realiscd that the man-catch would, sooner or later, descend the range and their turn would come to be hunted and devoured. The bells of the little temples in Windy Valley tinkled as pujas were offered for deliverance from the impending

scourge. The patel and the unfortunate Mariken also knew that, indirectly and inadvertently, they were responsible for the two deaths that had already occurred and the many that would undoubtedly follow.

The coolies in the coffee estates were the first to suffer. Their work of picking and gathering the berries took them into the thickets of the bushes, where the man-eater lay in wait for them. A woman here, a man there, disappeared as day succeeded day. Soon the coolies refused to do the picking and work came to a standstill. They sat idly in their huts at the cooly-lines and threatened to leave the estates in a body if something was not done at once to remove the menace that had come into their lives. The Sholagas on the hilltops locked themselves and their cattle indoors, and the latter soon began to starve.

These precautionary measures made hunting difficult for the man-eater. As food on the estates began to grow scarce, he moved down to the plains, forgetting that it was there he had received the wound, high on his left thigh, that had so greatly handicapped him in his hunting. In course of time the Villain, as he was now everywhere known, spread his activities all over the lands of the Windy Valley, while his toll of human lives mounted as week succeeded week.

News of the killer spread far and wide, and I found it in the papers at last, and by chance an opportunity to try to eliminate him came my way just about this time. I had suffered a sharp attack of malaria and the doctor had ordered complete rest and absence from work for ten days. As doctors glibly do, also advised a change.

My decision was a quick one. I could certainly think of better from of vacation than a trip into the jungles. Even if the doctor's idea of a rest had been rather different, there was no valid reason why he should be told where I had gone. So I did not tell him.

When I arrived at Lokkanahalli in my Studebaker, the villagers were ready to help with all the information they could give. But this was not of much value. Apparently the tiger followed no specific line of activity. He snatched his victims where and when he found them. Kills had been reported by the Sholagas inhabiting the hamlets around the villages of Lokkanahalli, Bailur and eastwards to Hanur and Ramapuram. Even on the hilltops, where the coolies in the coffee estates had somewhat relaxed their vigilance, one of them would be carried away now and again.

I conversed with the patel and Mariken, and later with some of the local hunters, in an effort to glean as much news as I could about the habits of this animal. But on all sides, the replies were the same. The

tiger seemed to be an extraordinarily cunning beast, and a vagrant who wandered at will all over the area without adopting the habit generally followed by maneaters of visiting particular places in routine.

That night I camped on the bund of the little tank just south of Lokkanahalli, where long ago Mariken had shot the sambar that had taken shelter in the water from the wild dogs that were chasing it. I enjoyed to the full the wind of Windy Valley when it started to blow at ten o'clock. It lulled me into a pleasant and cool slumber till I awoke with a start at 3 am. A strange silence was all around me. In spite of the early hour, I felt comparatively warm. The wind had stopped blowing. Could this have been what wakened me?

But a moment later I knew the real answer. From the west of the village, where the foothills of the mountain range, less than two miles away, broke the terrain into a number of furrowed nullahs and densely-wooded ravines, came the moaning call of a tiger on the prowl: 'OO-oon-gh! Aa-oongh! Aungh-ha! Ugh! Ugh!'

After that I could not sleep. For I accepted that challenge and my mind was busy working out possible ways of meeting the elusive tiger.

I was acquainted with the nature of the land where the beast was still calling, having in my younger and far more blood-thirsty years, hunted sloth-bears in this region. Rainwater after the monsoons, rushing down from the higher slopes, had carved many water-courses into the earth, all densely choked with undergrowth. It was ideal country for shooting bears, but a most difficult proposition so far as a tiger was concerned.

Early next morning I told the patel I had heard the tiger, and asked his help in purchasing three live baits to tie out in the area. He was not very sanguine about the proposition and replied it was a sheer waste of money, as the man-eater sought human prey only and would not deign to look at a young bull or buffalo heifer.

But I thought differently. Although he had killed a number of people, the tiger had to live on other food as well. This was the factor that had kept him from adopting the usual habit Of man-eaters: that of following a specific beat that might range for a hundred miles, but always pursued a fixed pattern, returning to the same spot and from the same direction every time.

Even with the patel's influence, it was 9 am before I obtained these animals - all young buffaloes - and set out with a party of men towards the foothills where the tiger had been calling, taking the baits along with us.

We found the tracks eventually - the unmistakable pugmarks of a male tiger in his prime - and after a great deal of stumbling about and scrambling through thorn and brush, finally selected three spots suitable for tying-up each of the heifers. All three of these were places where two or more ravines joined, so that the tiger in his wanderings along any one of them would stand a better chance of seeing the buffalo. Large trees were scarce in the area and it happened that there were none at the places I had selected for tying-up; I therefore left the problem of constructing a machan or hiding-place to be decided after the tiger had made his kill. This was a major error and with my experience I should have avoided it.

Machans, or at least the places for them, should be thought out when tying baits. But the absence of large trees, and I suppose a certain amount of carelessness and over-confidence, prompted me in this instance to make an elementary mistake which even a beginner would scarcely have done, and for which there was no real excuse.

Nothing happened that night and the following morning all the baits were alive. Incidentally, this respite afforded me ample time to select better places where machans or hide-ups of some sort could be constructed in advance, but I suppose I was too lazy to take advantage of it.

On the second morning we found one of the buffaloes had been killed and eaten. Pug-marks on the bed of the gully showed that the killer was the same tiger that had been calling two days earlier. They also indicated that the animal had tried to drag his victim away from where he had slain it, but that the rope by which we had tethered the heifer had held firm, while the tiger had fortunately not thought of biting it through.

But where was I to sit the following night to await the killer's return? No tree, large or small - not even a small bush - was available!

Seeing my predicament, the patel, who had come with us, came up with what he considered a brilliant idea. Why not enlist the aid of the bomb-makers? If a bomb could be hidden in the udder of one dead cow, surely another could be concealed somewhere in the intestines of a dead buffalo?

The wordlcss stare I gave him in reply caused the question to die on his lips; but in the return look of undisguised scorn he bestowed on me, I could clearly read his thoughts. If the dorai was such a damned fool as to pass up the easiest and best solution available in the circumstances, well he was just a damned fool!

I have told you that we had tied all three heifers at places where two or more ravines intersected. This particular bait had been tethered at a spot where three gullies met. Two of these were quite large nullahs and came directly from the hills to the west. Roughly, at the point of confluence they formed with each other and angle of about thirty degrees. The third was a much smaller affair, more in the nature of a ditch, and was about four feet deep. If you happened to stand facing the other two nullahs, this shallower ditch came in from the right, or northern side. The reason for its existence was a rise in the ground for some distance in that direction. Rain water, running down this slope, had eroded the soil over the years, forming a ditch.

The slayer's pugmarks, plainly visible in the soft earth, showed he had walked down the bed of one of the two deep nullahs coming in from the west, had seen the heifer and killed it, then tried to drag it away. Having not succeeded in his purpose, he had settled down and eaten a large part of his victim and had then gone back the way he had come, up the same nullah.

Thus the chances were that, when he returned for his next meal, he would approach along the same nullah. One fact was certain. Due to the absence of a tree, I would be compelled to await the killer's return sitting on the ground, in a hide of sort which we would have to construct. The point to be decided was: where to sit?

I knew that if we made any kind of hiding place directly along the line of the tiger's return, the chances were that he would spot it long before I even knew of his proximity. Coming back to their kills, tigers do not blunder blindly along, but are most cautious in their approach. This practice is no doubt partly due to the instinct of self-preservation, and partly to a reflex from their habit of ambushing many of their victims along the approaches to water-holes and on game trails. It was consequently not advisable to construct my hiding place anywhere on the nullah. This left three alternatives. The first, a hide at the point of confluence on the further bank of the remaining adjacent nullah which came in at an angle of thirty degrees. The second, a hide at the point of confluence of the low ditch. Thirdly, a hide at ground level, above and overlooking all three gullies.

The third proposition offered the advantage of height, whereby I could overlook the remains of the heifer that lay on the bed of the ravine and all approaches to it. But to sit at ground level would make me conspicuous, should the tiger happen to look up as he walked along the bed of any of the ravines. I would be silhouetted against the sky-

line. I would therefore have to lie prone all night, facing the kill, with my back towards the hills from which the tiger would undoubtedly come. I certainly did not relish the prospect.

The choice therefore lay between the first two alternatives, and I decided at last upon the second. I would Sit at the mouth Of the low ditch, I remember now that my reason for not choosing the other alternative was that I thought the tiger might after all approach down the second big nullah, which I have explained came in at a thirty-degree angle, rather the way he had used on his retreat the previous night, in which case he might discover my presence.

Now came the task of constructing a hide clever enough to deceive the tiger when he reached the spot where the remains of the dead buffalo lay. It would have to be a very smart piece of work, for I knew the tiger would carefully inspect the vicinity before he settled down to his meal.

There is a cardinal rule to be borne in mind in constricting any sort of hide or machan. It must match as closely as possible the general topography of the surroundings. For example, hide in the form of a bush would be foolish at a place where bushes were scarce. The leaves, concealing the machan or hide must be from the same plants or trees as those in the immediate vicinity, and they should not be placed upside down, with their under portions showing. A machan, no matter how concealed, would be an eyesore if built on a tree with few no leaves. Conversely, a bare and unconcealed machan, on a leafy tree, would shout aloud of its existence.

As I have related, the ditch I had selected had been hollowed out by rain-water flowing down from the rising ground to the north. Rocks had been isolated along its course here and there and henna and valari bushes overhung it on both banks

We walked up this ditch for about 200 yards, where I selected five large-sized stones and certain henna and valari shrubs. We then carried these rocks to the point of confluence with the two nullahs, making three trips for the purpose, returning a fourth time to cut the shrubs I had selected at their bnases.

The five stones I arranged as naturally as possible, with the shrubs in between them, to form a rough screen facing the remains of the heifer that lay less than ten yards away. This set-up had to be carefully and artistically done to avoid the appearance of a conspicuous wall, at the same time providing sufficient concealment.

All this took a long while, so that it was nearly one o'clock in the afternoon by the time we had finished. Cutting some more shrubs with

which to conceal the remains of the heifer from the vultures while I returned to Lokkanahalli for lunch, we hurried back to the village.

I believe in sitting up over a kill as early as possible rather than arriving at the last moment. No doubt this prolongs the tedium, but to me it is never tedious to sit silently in a jungle. There is so much to see, so much to listen to, so much to be learned that the hours slip by almost faster than I would wish.

The Sholagas who had accompanied me in the morning refused to go with me again. They said that, after leaving me at the hiding-place, they would have to return alone, and this would be dangerous. Supposing the man-eater was watching our movements and attacked them on their way back to the village unarmed?

I certainly could not blame them, so I returned alone, reaching the kill by 3.30 pm, where I first removed the shrubs with which we had concealed the carcass of the buffalo, and carried them back the two hundred yards down the water-course from where we had cut them earlier. Lopped branches or shrubs should never be left lying about in the vicinity of a kill. Tigers are suspicious of the least thing, and such objects make them aware of the presence of human beings, and they not return to a kill where they may suspect an ambush. Even man-eaters, although they devour people, are inherently afraid of the human race and will hesitate to come to a spot where they feel men may be in hiding. If he thinks he is being hunted, the average man-eater turns into an abject coward and does his best to get away.

As it happened, my early sit-up on this occasion was rewarded by a quite unexpected event. Hardly an hour had elapsed when a movement of the grass growing on the bank of the second nullah before me - the one that the tiger had not used - caught my eye. Watching very carefully, I saw what appeared to be a pair of short, upright objects projecting behind the clump of grass. A fact that struck me as singular was that they seemed to be always equidistant from each other. When one moved, the other moved, always in the same way, always in the same direction. Sometimes they rose a little higher, and at other times sank from view behind the grass, only to rise again. They seemed to be watching me as intently as I was watching them.

What could these two strange creatures be?

For a full half-hour I watched those two objects. At first I thought them to be a pair of small birds. Strange birds, indeed, to move always in unison, to remain always the same distance apart!

Then the solution flashed to my mind. Some animal was watching me,

and what I was looking at were the tips of its ears.

Could it be the man-eater? It must be! I gripped my loaded rifle with mounting excitement, waiting for the next move in this strange game of spying.

Nothing happened for another ten minutes. I remained absolutely motionless, hardly daring to breathe. At last the two points started to rise higher above the grass. I saw the top of the head that joined the two ears. Then two baleful eyes glared at me.

But the watcher was no tiger. It was a panther!

How could this be, I wondered. Were the Sholagas all wrong? Perhaps the man-eater was a panther after all, and not a tiger! But the heifer had been clearly killed by a tiger. The pugmarks confirmed that, and the manner in which it had been eaten.

Finally the panther stood upright, still glaring in my direction. Then he walked through the grass and down the bank on to the bed of the second nullah. He was still looking at my hide. I sat still.

The panther was abreast of the remains of the heifer now. He hesitated awhile, turning his head towards the carcass. Then he walked up to it.

But he did not eat. Apprehensively, he kept glancing in my direction and then all around him. He even looked back intently over his shoulder along the way he had come. By his nervous movements, I could divine his thoughts.

Something worried him about my hide. Either he could see me or he suspected my presence behind my screen of boulders and shrubs. Perhaps he noticed these had not been there when he had last passed this way. Further, his furtive glances around and behind clearly showed that he knew he was about to steal from a kill rightly belonging to his overlord - a tiger! He also knew that, if he was caught in the act, his life would be forfeit!

With another glance around, the panther finally bent his head to eat. Then at the last moment his courage failed him. He emitted a low snarl and backed away.

The animal half-turned, maybe with the intention of departing, when he thought of, or observed, my hide again. He stared in my direction more intently than ever. In turn, I sat motionless, even holding my breath.

Curiosity got the better of the panther at this point. He came over to investigate. I did nothing but grip my rifle more tightly. He came as

close as two yards before he finally discovered me.

His reactions were amusing - and terrifying! I could see surprise, anger, fear, then terror, register in his eyes. He snarled. He sank to the ground, head between his paws with his rear sticking up ludicrously behind, his tail standing even higher.

I thought he was going to charge and swung the rifle to my shoulder, aiming between his eyes. My finger was beginning to press the trigger. At that moment the panther's courage failed ignominiously for the second time. He somersaulted backwards, recovered and fled. In two bounds he had gone! Indeed, I was glad I had come early that afternoon for this was a curious experience and I learned from it a lot.

Firstly, the hide I was sitting in was obviously a flop. The panther had noticed it from the start. Secondly, I had had another lesson in the value of sitting absolutely motionless. The panther had approached to within six feet before his keen eyes had been able to detect me, seated within. Thirdly, I had witnessed an interesting spectacle of a panther's obvious dread of his bigger cousin, the tiger. Those terror-stricken glances he had cast around and behind had shown this plainly Fourthly, I had received clear proof of the average panther's fear of a human being, even at close quarters.

Fifthly, I cursed myself for the fool I had been in not tying my baits at places where there were convenient trees in which to erect machans in the event of a kill. I now had the prospect of sitting on the ground all night to await the return of a maneating tiger, in a hide that was so obvious in nature and character that it had been discovered and held in suspicion by a harmless passing panther, right from the very start. But how would the man-eater react?

I was pleased and I was disgusted!

The remainder of the evening drew slowly to a close. The scrub-jungle all around appeared alive with the lesser birds of the wild. Partridges called in all directions, and bevies of quail scuttled down and across the nullahs, digging in the soft warm sand for insects and worms. A nervous hare loped to the edge of the ravine, looked down at the scattered remains of the heifer, turned around and bobbed away. The jungle proper commenced at the base of the foothills, half-a-mile distant, and the cooling breezes that floated down from the heights above carried the calls of roosting peafowl and the scent of far-away jungle flowers.

The sun had disappeared long before behind the towering range to the west and it grew prematurely dark by six o'clock. In another half-an-

hour it was night. For my bad luck there would be no moon, although the stars came out one by one and soon dusted the blue-black sky with a myriad trembling points of light.

An instinct, a silent voice, then began to warn me urgently. I could feel the danger, strongly and critically, although there was apparently nothing happening to give cause for my alarm. All was as silent as the grave.

And then in a flash it came to me: the reason for my apprehension. The silence that had suddenly fallen over everything was unnatural. Not even a cricket chirped.

There could be only one explanation. Something was passing by. Something that frightened all the lesser creatures of the world into a terrified silence.

That something could only be a tiger!

I strained my ears to catch the slightest sound and my eyes to Probe the faint light in the nullah-bed before me. Not a sound was to be heard, not an object moved.

The carcass of the heifer formed a faint dark blur on the lighter background of the ravine sand; it was beginning to smell horribly. I stared at it intently.

The minutes passed. They seemed to stretch into hours. The feeling of imminent danger that screamed its warning to me increased. I was moved by an almost irresistible urge to spring from my hiding place and to run away as fast and far Possible from this horrible and dangerous spot.

With difficulty I controlled my nerves. There appeared no reason for the strange terror that had overtaken me. Everything was quiet and peaceful. It was early, too; my watch showed only 7.50 pm.

I thought of the panther's behaviour and of how he had discovered or somehow sensed the existence of my hide. The thought made me even more afraid. Had the tiger discovered me in the same way? Was he even now creeping forward for the final spring?

The answer came in the form of a shattering roar a few yards behind me, followed by a piercing scream and the sound of heavy bodies floundering and scuffling in the underbrush. The shriek was repeated, accompanied by the most horrible snarls and growls as the tiger drove home his merciless attack.

In a flash I realised what was happening. The man-eater had indeed

been approaching his kill, but by the most unexpected route! He had been coming along the very ditch in which I was hiding and within a few seconds would have crept up behind me. The sixth sense which had so often warned me of grave danger had again tried to give its message. But my material senses had been too dull to interpret the warning correctly - at least, so far as the position of the approaching danger was concerned.

The dying screams of the animal he had encountered on the way - and whose presence had undoubtedly saved my life - were still to be heard, but faintly now, as it gasped out its life between the tiger's jaws! A wild-pig, probably a sow. No doubt, she had come down from the hills towards the cultivated land: bordering the road, when she had very unluckily, but most luckily for me, met the tiger!

Silence ensued, followed after a short while by the crunching sound of bones and the satisfied rumbling, purring growls the tiger as he tucked into the meal. Apparently the feast was taking place within fifty yards of where I sat, and yet there nothing I could do and nothing to be seen.

To attempt to move would be to betray my presence to the killer at once. No matter how carefully I might try, I was certain to make some sort of noise. Had there been moonlight, there might have been some chance of seeing the tiger over the tops of the intervening bushes, if I stood on tiptoe and craned my neck, but in the existing conditions there was not a hope of doing that. All I could do was to turn around stealthily, slowly, with infinite caution, to face the direction from which the sounds were coming. So long as those sounds continued, I was safe. It was when they ceased that I would have to look out. For then, the tiger might decide to continue walking down the shallow water-course to investigate his earlier kill - the dead heifer - and perhaps taste a mouthful or two by way of a dessert after his banquet of pork.

I knew that if the tiger decided to follow this course he would discover me before he ever reached the dead buffalo. There was then every possibility that I would form the dessert instead!

The feast continued for two hours, and it was still going on when suddenly the sounds could be heard no more. It was exactly ten o'clock and the winds of Windy Valley were beginning to blow. Right on time, that strange and to me inexplicable phenomenon that I had welcomed and enjoyed so often began again. But I did not and could not enjoy it then!

I heard the distant howl of the approaching blast as it advanced down the hillsides, whistling through the treetops to a rising crescendo. It came ever closer and in a minute was upon me, a screaming, rushing,

roaring violence. Windy Valley was living up to its name, and because of it I could no longer hear the tiger, nor would I be able to hear him for the next five hours - until three in the morning! He might be miles away, or a few yards; it made not one iota of difference, for I would not be able to hear him, or any other sound, for a long while to come.

Infinitely worse was the fact that, as I was sitting in a position between the tiger and the direction from which the wind was blowing, although he could not scent me, his acute powers of hearing would definitely pick up any sound I made. Altogether, I was in an unenviable plight.

That wind blew on and on. Nothing could I hear but its continuous, compelling song in the undergrowth and bushes that covered the broken region of ravines in which I had taken up my position. The minutes dragged by as, moment by moment, I expected the man-eater to discover my presence and put an end to me. It grew colder and colder. My teeth began to chatter and I knew that this was yet another sound that might betray me. The hours of mental agony and fear dragged on as I glanced at my watch a hundred times.

At last it was eleven o'clock and, after what seemed an eternity, midnight. I grew more alert than ever.

It was a little later that, above the movement and noise of the wind in the surrounding grass, I thought I could hear the bushes swish a little louder, as if brushed by some large animal moving through them. I gripped my rifle and stared intently into the darkness where the tiger had been eating. Then it was that I noticed that the sound seemed to be coming from somewhere to my left.

You will remember how I had taken up my position facing the ravine and the dead heifer and how, when I had heard the tiger killing the wild sow to my right, I had stealthily turned around to face that way. Now this strange, swishing sound that was undoubtedly growing louder came from the direction of the main ravine and the dead heifer, which were now to my left, and not from where the tiger had been feasting.

Furtively I turned my head to look, and, after staring at the faint area of luminosity where the sands of the ravine reflected the starlight, I saw a black shadow rapidly advancing down the nullah up which the tiger had retreated the previous day. But this shadow was the size of a rock! Then the answer came to me in a flash: here was an elephant!

The elephant drew closer and eventually passed within a few feet. I had turned my head right around and was now looking over my right shoulder. I could just see his tusks against the black shadow of the body behind, But, close as he was, the tusker was up-wind and was

quite unaware of my proximity. Had the breeze been blowing in the opposite direction, he could not fail to have scented me.

But the tiger soon discovered the presence of the elephant. He growled and snarled, and I could hear him above the howling of the wind.

So could the elephant. He had scarcely passed me when the tiger had begun to growl. The elephant stopped abruptly, swung around to face the sound, and struck his trunk twice against the ground, before curling the member tightly inwards out of harm's way.

Still glancing fearfully over my shoulder, I could see it all. The dark bulk of the huge beast was clearly outlined against the light-coloured sands of the ravine in the glow from the thousands of stars that looked serenely down upon the strange scene.

The elephant scraped one of his forefeet vigorously upon the sand, raising a cloud of dust; his ears ceased flapping and were drawn tightly against his head, while his tail stuck rigidly out behind him. To me the signs were clear enough. Although elephants and tigers usually avoid each other, this particular Pachyderm did not intend to be chased ignominiously away by any tiger that chose to challenge him.

My position had now become extremely precarious. Should these two engines of destruction decide to do battle, I would be right in the middle of the fray. In their fury, they would rush and charge at each other indiscriminately. I was in fearful danger either of being trampled upon by the elephant or discovered by the tiger and torn to ribbons in his rage.

Further thoughts of this kind were dispelled by the tiger. With a loud 'Woof! woof!! woof!!!', he came leaping through the bushes in a series of short bounds till he reached the ravine a few feet below the junction of its two higher branches and at the place where the remains of the half-devoured heifer were lying. Evidently he had not forgotten his earlier kill while feasting on the sow, and hearing the elephant near it, had jumped to the conclusion that the trespasser was interfering with his property. No doubt, this was what caused him to growl and snarl in the first instance, and when the elephant answered the challenge, had made him rush out so precipitately.

The tiger was once more to my left, scarcely twenty feet away, while the elephant, who had been walking down the ravine, had shifted almost behind me, perhaps fifty to sixty feet from the tiger. I could not watch both animals, so I concentrated on the tiger. He sank down on his belly, snarling and growling terribly, while his tail lashed from side

to side behind him.

In another second something was going to happen. Either the tiger or the elephant would work up enough courage to charge; perhaps both. Whatever happened, I would be in the direct line of battle.

I knew the tiger was watching the elephant's every move, and I knew the elephant was watching the tiger. In this lay my last and only chance. For a few moments this close watching game would continue, and then one or other or both the contestants would have reached the point of no return and would launch an attack that would certainly eliminate me as an eyewitness of its conclusion.

The stock of my rifle was already against my shoulder and I pressed the button of the torch with my left thumb. The bright beam fell on the tiger, startling him and causing him to stare back in mute surprise.

Then I fired, and as the great feline rolled in the dust. I worked the underlever of my rifle rapidly and pressed the trigger twice more. I could not afford to take chances with a wounded man-eater.

The tiger lay sprawled in almost the very spot where my first shot had taken him. He was kicking feebly when I remembered the elephant behind me and craned my head sharply to the left. But there was nothing to be seen. The elephant had fled.

The tiger had stopped kicking by the time I had turned to him again, and I knew that he was dead. The reaction from the prolonged nervous tension I had been through for well over two hours left me feeling sick and with a severe headache.

But now the winds of Windy Valley really came to my aid. Their strong, cooling balm soon swept the headache away, and I sat back contentedly to luxuriate in their freshness, and to watch again the splendour of the stars that crowded the heavens above, throwing their thin light on the bushes and the bed of the ravine, and on the dark form of the dead tiger.

I fell asleep.

I awoke later with a start. All around me was a deathly silence. The stars had disappeared, hidden behind a black canopy of clouds. I wondered what had happened, why everything was so strangely still. Then I glanced at my watch and knew the answer. It was ten minutes after three and the strange winds had ceased to blow as abruptly as they had begun.

In a little while it began to rain, so I got up and started walking towards the village, following the beam of my torchlight across the many ditches and nullahs that intervened and the bushes that grew between them.

I was soaking wet when I reached Lokkanahalli, but I was also very happy, for with a rare stroke of good luck, I had accomplished my mission within a few hours. I could now really take the rest my doctor had advised.

When I woke again it was nine o'clock and the sun was shining brightly. Also I was not so happy now, for the thought came almost as soon as I awoke: suppose I had not accounted for the man-eater after all? Maybe the tiger I had shot was just a harmless beast. For it had killed a heifer and then a wildpig. I had no evidence it was the man-eater.

The Sholagas crowded into the village during the afternoon to see the tiger after we had brought it in, and they affirmed that the animal was indeed the Villain of Windy Valley But still I had no proof and was not entirely happy.

A day later, I returned to Bangalore, and for six months after that, there were no human kills in any of the regions where the elusive tiger had been operating. So, probably after all, it was the man-after that I got that memorable night, while I have often wished that I had had the chance to witness the end of the fight to which I was so unfortunately compelled to put an end even before it had begun.

7 The Lonely Panther of Kuppa Gudda Hill

This story concerns my son Donald and his exploits with panthers, or rather one of them in particular, which we have called 'the lonely panther' because the poor beast was lonely, and all that happened in the story sprang from the fact. Further, it was Donald who made him lonely, for Donald had shot his mate.

My son, about whom I have related a few incidents in earlier books, has a peculiar liking for shooting panthers. Up to the present he has shot about seventy of them, I think, and never seems to tire of it. This is a topic on which I have lectured him many times, but I fear my admonishment is yet another example of good seed falling on barren ground.

His particular area of operations for these panthers is within a radius of about ten miles west, north and east of the small town of Closepet, which in recent years has been renamed Ramnagaram by the Government of Mysore.

This place is situated quite close to Bangalore, only about thirty-three miles away, and is a rapidly developing township. What with its growth, the proximity of Bangalore, and Don's tireless efforts at killing them, it is a matter of wonder to me that any panthers are left in the area! But from what he says, their supply seems to continue unabated. No sooner does he shoot one than another appears to take its place! This constant replenishment of panther-stock speaks well for the number of these magnificent beasts in our neighbourhood, their ability to survive, breed and multiply under adverse circumstances, and of course the suitability of the surrounding terrain as a breeding and feeding ground.

If you can procure a map of the area to the south-west of Bangalore, you will see the reason for this. It is one vast region of broken, rugged land, split by thousands of ravines and nullahs running down the sides and along the valleys of hundreds of rough, stony hills; it abounds in boulders, caves and deep hidden spaces, and the whole clothed in a carpet of that curse of the vegetable world - the lantana shrub - which is not without its benefits to man, beast and bird. For the juice of its leaves is a wonderful means of stopping external bleeding in any shape or form, besides being a powerful antiseptic; its black berries are gormandised by animals and birds alike; and its beautiful miniature bouquets of variegated, tiny flowers, ranging from white to scarlet, red,

orange, pink and yellow, carpet the hillsides in a flowered mosaic of many patterns, as if Nature had carelessly cast a patchwork blanket over the landscape.

But hidden by that sea of colour, and between the stems of the lantana shrubs that average five to six feet in height, animals have burrowed tunnels and pathways quite inaccessible to man. Here mouse-deer, porcupine and pig lie up in the hours of hot, bright sunshine, returning to the fields at night to reap their harvest of grain. Here the panthers crawl in after them, feed on them, and flourish in spite of all efforts to destroy them, in which, as I have said, Donald continues to play a very active part.

I suppose everyone likes to tell his own story, and so I will let Don carry on from here and tell you, in his own words, about the panther he first called 'Lonely':

One day Chowdhri, my shikari from Ramnagaram, turned up to say that a panther had killed a calf the previous evening within a mile of the village of Kyalanche, which is about six miles to the east of Ramnagaram itself. The owners of the calf had asked him to bring word to me of the occurrence, as they had seen me shooting panthers in the area on previous occasions, and fortunately had had the sense to cover what was left of the carcass with brambles when they located it, before sending Chowdhri to call me. Apparently the panther had eaten an enormous lot of the calf during the night, for they had said there was only about one-third of the carcass left. Anyhow, they felt there was sufficient left for the killer to return the following night, and had hidden the remains, as I have said, from the eyes of the questing vultures that are always on the search for food. These voracious birds would have finished the lot within half-an-hour had they only caught sight of the remains.

Chowdhri had grabbed his brother's bicycle and covered the six miles to Ramnagaram, where he had been lucky enough to get a lift on a lorry that brought him to Bangalore. He turned up a few minutes before nine o'clock, just as I was going out.

After hearing his story, I bundled him and my shooting kit, which I always keep ready for such sudden calls, into my car, and in a few minutes we were on our way.

We reached Kyalanche, where I left the car and, accompanied by Chowdhri and the owner of the calf, hurried to the spot where the remains lay. That one mile turned out to be more like three, but we arrived in due course.

The owner had not exaggerated. There was not much of the calf left, but sufficient, however, to entice the panther to return. As a matter of fact, I have found panthers coming back to their kills even when they have already finished everything there was to be eaten, also to carcasses that are far gone in decomposition and crawling with worms. They like to pick up a morsel here and a tit-bit there. Tigers will never do this sort of thing.

There was no tree for a machan, but only the proverbial lantana, and this meant that I would have to sit on the ground in a 'hide'.

The difficulty is to construct them cleverly enough to conceal from the panther that you are there. Necessarily, due to the undergrowth, the 'hide' has to be close to the kill, sometimes very close. Otherwise the carcass will not be visible. That is where the trouble comes in; for panthers are extremely cautious in approaching their kills. The key to the secret of constructing an efficient 'hide' lies in making it out of the material that exists in the vicinity.

Now as there was only lantana, and nothing else, growing at this spot, the 'hide' would have to be constructed of lantana alone. It would never do to bring in any other sort of vegetation—not even a leaf!

I have found the best plan in such cases is to hollow out the centre of a clump or thicket of lantana by cutting away the central branches at ground level, leaving enough space to sit and using the cut branches to place round the bush itself, together with some more lantana twigs, cut and brought from bushes far away, and never under any circumstances from bushes close by, to conceal the person inside from view. An opening must be left facing the kill, wide enough to fire through when the time comes, but never too large. This is the general idea. The details, of course are not so simple. They come from practice and experience.

It took us a long time to construct that 'hide', paying special attention to the entire concealment of the occupant – myself - from all angles of approach, while at the same time not over-doing it, making the whole affair too massive and conspicuous and thereby arousing the suspicions of the panther. In such circumstances he would snoop around for quite a while before he attempted to tackle what was left of his meal.

It was about three o'clock by the time we had finished. I knew the panther would not return till well after five, so, as there was nothing more for them to do, I sent Chowdhri and the cattle-man back to the village. As I was feeling hungry, having missed my lunch, I sat down in my place of concealment to munch the sardine sandwiches I had

hurriedly brought from home.

This did not take long. They were hardly enough and I was still feeling hungry when the sandwiches were finished. There was a long while yet to wait before the panther would return and I gave myself up to day-dreaming.

The shrubs all around were alive with birds, mostly bulbuls and 'seven-sisters', feeding on either the black berries of the lantana or the insects that came to eat them, including the bees, butterflies and moths that visited the clusters of flowers for the nectar hidden within each. So I knew that I would not have to keep a very careful watch for the panther, since long before I could hope to discover his approach the birds in the bushes all around would warn me of his movements.

So let me tell you quickly, before the panther comes, something about these bulbuls and the 'seven-sisters' that were chirping all around me.

There are several varieties of the former, including a pale green species, but the two kinds mainly occurring in Southern India are the 'hill-bulbul' and the 'plains-bulbul'. The former is a perky bird, about the size of a robin, with almost black wings and back and a white chest. He wears a very pointed crest of feathers, about an inch long, above his head, and two red spots, as natural rosy cheeks, on either side of his face, with a splash of red at the root of his tail. The plains-bulbul is coloured just the same, but does not have the pointed crest or rosy cheeks. Both varieties are vigorous whistlers, omnivorous eaters, are frequently kept in captivity and sold in the market by the hundreds as cage-birds.

The 'seven-sisters' are so called because they are always to be found in families, supposedly composed of seven members each. Whether this is correct I cannot guarantee, as I have never counted the birds in a family; but I know that you will never find a 'seven-sister' alone. There will always be a number of them about. As a youngster, I once-caught a half-grown 'seven-sister' and tried to keep it in captivity, but in a couple of days it was dead. Obviously, it had fretted for its companions. A bird of uniformly dull slate colour, half as large again as a bulbul, these birds eat insects and make an incessant noisy twitter, especially when they see or sense the approach of any creature in the undergrowth.

Many years ago I heard from a friend who came from Ahmedabad that the 'Saurus Crane', a large grey bird this is plentiful in those parts, is to be found always in pairs. People shoot them to eat, and my friend said

that should one be killed, either the cock or the hen, the other would die of loneliness within a few days. They were therefore locally known by the English-speaking people of the district where they were to be found as the 'ideal lovers', and sometimes as 'Darby and Joan'.

A sudden flutter of bushes and the sound of frightened birds arrested my attention. I glanced at my watch and was surprised to find that time had passed rapidly. It was 5.20 pm, and the unexpected commotion in the undergrowth could only one thing. The panther was coming!

Without moving my body, glanced out of the opening in my hide, from where could see the mangled remains of the dead calf lying on the ground before me. It was alone and there nothing and no movement to be seen anywhere near it.

The seven-sisters were twittering and jabbering in concert now; the chirping of the bulbuls had risen to a sharp crescendo; and a blue-jay, invisible and silent till this moment, hurled itself, screeching raucously, into the sky. All this was happening beyond the dead calf and the sea of lantana hid the cause of the disturbance; but to me it was quite plain that the panther was creeping between the stems of the lantana on its way back to the kill, taking its time to do so in its usual, cautious manner, but all to no avail to a person who is familiar with jungle signs For the birds had discovered it, with their senses and eyes alert for the slightest of movements.

Just then there was another stir and bustle, this time in quite the opposite direction and behind me. Again that flutter of bushes and sound of frightened birds. Again that jabbering and twittering, but from a completely different family of seven-sisters and bulbuls, although there was now no blue-jay to confirm the alarm.

There was no doubt about it. The panther was coming up behind me.

That's strange, I thought. Hardly a minute earlier, it was approaching from directly in front. It just shows how quickly and silently these cunning beasts can move.

Once again I glanced through the opening in my hide at the dead calf. But this time it was not alone. Standing beside it, and staring hard in my direction, was the glossy form of a medium-sized panther. The comparatively small skull in proportion to the rest of the body, and the sleek, lightly-built cut of the profile, showed that the killer was a female.

I knew that if I made the slightest movement now, even the flicker of an eyelid, the pantheress would notice it and, in a bound, be away. Evidently, with the infinite trouble and pains we had taken in

constructing the 'hide', there was still something suspicious about it that had registered on the visitor.

So I just froze!

Perhaps five minutes dragged by while the pantheress continued her unflinching stare in my direction and I reciprocated just as unflinchingly.

The tension relaxed. Momentarily she looked away, then down at her kill. I knew the time had come for the shot, as I very slowly raised the stock of my rifle and fitted it to my shoulder.

She dropped to my bullet behind her ear and kicked spasmodically on the ground. Then she twitched, trembled and was still.

The pantheress was dead, and this is where my real story begins.

Something big and heavy leaped upon my hide from the rear, and the lantana branches and twigs that we had painstakingly arranged in so artistic a fashion quaked and came crashing down upon my back, lurching me forwards so that I was bent double, my chest upon my folded legs. An angry roar deafened me and I turned my head to discover what on earth was happening.

Two feet away, above the mass of lantana now resting upon my back, I could see the snarling visage of a panther, eyes glowering at me. There was a scraping and scurry of movement as the brute endeavoured to reach me with the claws of his outstretched paws, trying to force them through the branches and twigs of the intervening lantana.

The beast's large square head now literally sprawled on top of me, revealing a male panther, undoubtedly the mate of the female I had just shot, bent upon revenge. It was the presence of this second panther that had frightened the birds behind me. They had warned me a few moments earlier of his coming, but I had been too dense and had failed to understand. Now he had me at his mercy, for however much I tried I could not straighten myself to bring the rifle around in his direction. The weight on my back was colossal, crushing me forwards relentlessly. I knew that in a few moments those talons, scrambling and searching for revenge, would reach their goal and tear my back to ribbons.

I then did the only two things possible under such circumstances. I screamed aloud, and I worked the bolt of my rifle desperately with my right hand, as it pressed against my stomach. Then I squeezed the trigger.

The bullet crashed through the dense lantana and buried itself in the ground a yard or so before me, sending a spray of sand and leaves against my face. In the terror of the moment, I repeated the action, firing a second bullet to join the first.

The thunder of the two reports at such close quarters must have been deafening for the panther. They had the desired result. There was a loud snarl, and the next moment, that fiendish countenance vanished from my line of vision. I knew I was safe. I had had a lucky escape from a severe mauling at the very least, if not from being killed outright by the male panther, who must have been directly behind me when I fired the shot that killed his mate and betrayed my presence.

It took me quite a few minutes to recover from the effects of the excitement. Then I stepped cautiously out of the hide, expecting at any moment to see that horrid spotted form come hurtling down upon me once more. But nothing happened.

I glanced at the motionless form of the female I had shot and then carefully retraced my way through the scrub till 1 reached the cattle track leading to the village.

Chowdhri and the other villagers were not expecting my return so soon, and when I told them of what had happened, an old grey-beard among them wagged his head and looked at me reproachfully.

'By killing his mate, you have aroused the fury of the panther, dorai. No doubt she was in cub and that is why he so attached to her. You will now return to Bangalore from where you came, and leave us and our cattle to bear the brunt of his anger and revenge.'

With those sinister words, he spat upon the ground, looked venomously at me and stalked away down the main lane of the little hamlet like some prophet of old who had pronounced his curse.

That old man was right. When we returned to fetch the body of the pantheress we discovered that her fur was damp. The panther had come back and had been licking his mate, trying to awaken her and bring her back to life. And when we removed her pelt later in the village, we found she was in cub. Three fully-formed little panthers had lost their lives along with their mother.

I felt rather ashamed of what I had done.

Three days later, I was surprised to find Chowdhri at my door again. It was just after six in the morning and I guessed something important had happened to bring him there so early.

And I was right. He had caught the early morning passenger train from Mysore at about four o'clock, when it stopped at Ramnagaram. He came to report that the panther had been calling and moaning all night, for the past three nights in succession, in search of his dead mate, and the previous evening it had killed a large cow that had been grazing on the outskirts of the village

When the cow failed to return shortly before sundown, her owners, who happened to be two brothers, had gone out in search of her. They knew she had been feeding close to the village where they had tied her, and they thought that perhaps a band of wandering Lambani Gypsies, who were in a camp a few miles away, might have taken the animal.

When they came to the uncultivated field where they had left their cow that afternoon, they saw signs of a struggle in the soft grass, and a few yards away there was dried blood and the smear of dung that had passed from the cow in her last spasmodic efforts to free herself from her attacker's death-grip.

Then they knew she had been killed by a panther and started to follow the drag-mark, clearly visible through the grass, as it led across the field towards a dip in the ground.

They reached the hollow and soon discovered the partially devoured remains of their precious animal. She had been a large cow, and although the panther had eaten heartily, he had not succeeded in finishing half of his victim, thus leaving a tidy portion for his next meal.

The further actions of the two brothers had, at this stage, been rudely disturbed by an ominous growl from the lantana bushes farther along the hollow. In a flash they knew the killer had returned and was watching them. Perhaps he had been there all the time. He was furious at their intrusion, and they were unarmed. Without more ado, the two brothers fled.

Back at the village, they sent Chowdhri post-haste to Bangalore to summon me who, they plainly said, was the cause of their present loss. They even paid his fare by the early morning passenger train, instructing him to recover it from me and repay it to them.

Within twenty minutes Chowdhri and I were on our way and reached the little village of Kyalanche within a mile of a hillock named Kuppa Guda shortly before eight o'clock. The first thing I did after meeting the two brothers was solemnly to hand over the train fare of one rupee and a few annas that they had advanced for Chowdhri's ticket to Bangalore.

The four of us then proceeded to the hollow to which they had followed the drag the previous evening, only to discover the panther had removed the remains of the cow during the night after having eaten a second good meal. This time there was no drag-mark, for what had been left had not been enough to trail along the ground. The panther had carried the remains away in his mouth. Judging from the fact that he had eaten so much of a large cow in two meals, and certainly from those few fearful moments when he had glared down upon me as he tried to reach me with his paws, this was a large specimen indeed, well above the size attained by the ordinary panther that preys on village herds.

I knew that it would be hardly worthwhile to tie out any fresh bait that night. For not only was the panther gorged with meat, but he still had the portion to eat that he had carried away with him the previous night. Yet it seemed to be the only way in which to entice him again.

So I selected a tree, tied a machan to it, and tethered beneath it a half-grown goat that I knew would bleat as soon as it was left alone.

I got into the machan at five o'clock, after which Chowdhri tied the goat to the stake we had earlier driven in the ground. Then they went away, talking loudly to the man who had helped in the erection of the machan. Having climbed into the tree myself before the goat was tied out, the animal was unaware of my presence and began to bleat loudly as soon as he thought he had been left alone.

I was overjoyed at the amount of noise he was making. Without doubt, any panther moving within a radius of a mile from this spot would hear the sound and would hasten towards the prospective feast.

And that was exactly what happened. A panther did hear. Arid it did hasten. The only thing wrong was that it was not the large male I was awaiting, It was quite a small panther - another pantheress in fact. I could clearly make that out by her small head and her rather lanky, lightly-built appearance.

With visions of some more fully-formed cubs inside her, I shooed the greedy creature away before she could kill the goat. The look of sheer terror she bestowed on me, and her frightened snarl, showed she was quite incapable of displaying the courage recently exhibited by the revengeful male.

I sat all night in that machan, hoping that at some time the big panther I was after would turn up. But it did not happen. The goat bleated itself hoarse by seven o'clock. Its cries turned to a whisper and after that it could make no sound whatsoever. Finally it resigned itself to being

alone, curled up on the ground and went to sleep.

I heard the moaning call of the bereaved male for the first time at about ten o'clock. He was rather far away then. I judged he was calling from the top of Kuppa Gudda hill. There are a number of underground caves on that hill, piled one upon another and inter-connected by narrow tunnels leading apparently into the very bowels of the hill. I had shot seven panthers on Kuppa Gudda within the previous five years, and now I had no doubt that the male I was looking for had followed the old pattern of things by taking up his abode in one of these caves or tunnels. Probably he had carried the remains of the cow to that very place, where he had finished it and gone to sleep for the rest of the day. This would account for his late awakening, when normally he should have been about much earlier in the evening.

There seemed little likelihood that he would come my that night, to stumble upon my sleeping goat by the merest chance, so I made up my mind to try to flush him out of his cave, or wherever he was hiding on the hill, the following afternoon at the hottest time of the day, when he would be inactive and reluctant to show much fight.

The panther came down from the hill during the night and wandered in a wise circle, skirting the village and keeping to the low, scrub-covered hillocks that surrounded it, but never did he come my way. And as he moved he kept up that incessant soft, moaning call that plaintive cry to his missing mate, the mother of his cubs that I knew could never answer his summons.

Again I regretted having fired the shot that had parted this devoted pair. However, the damage had been done. The panther might get over his loneliness in time and find another mate. But there was also the possibility that this time Nature might not be willing to help me out. The panther might not so easily forget his mate and seek another. Nature might not, in this case, fill the missing gap. The male might grow more morose during the next few weeks. He might become revengeful, seeking to relieve his loneliness by killing more and more cattle and eventually some of the human beings who would naturally try to protect them by driving him off.

I knew, then, that it was up to me to try to eliminate him the next day at any cost, by seeking him out among the caves on Kuppa Gudda hill where he was hiding.

I fell asleep at about two in the morning and awoke at six, cramped and chilled to the bone by the heavy dew that had fallen in the early hours. The goat was standing disconsolately by the peg to which he was tied, shivering with the cold and looking extremely dejected. When

I walked up to release him, he brightened visibly, wagged his stumpy tail and snuggled his muzzle confidingly against the warmth of my arm. I felt a Judas as I released him and led him back to the village.

There I drank several tumblers of warm coffee, ate a hot dosai (a flat cake prepared from fried rice-flour and chutney) and went to sleep in Chowdhri's hut for an hour or two, till the sun grew really hot and it was time to begin looking for the panther.

Exactly at noon, Chowdhri and I arrived at the foot of Kuppa Gudda hill. This is no more than a hillock, perhaps 400 feet high, standing about a mile or more to the east of Kyalanche village, and about a quarter of a mile south of a narrow road leading from Ramnagaram to another town called Kanakapura, some sixteen miles away. This whole area is full of panthers, there being many more of them among the hundred little lantana-covered hills that cover the countryside than in the heart of the dense forests where the big game animals, including tiger, are to be found. In this area the panther holds undisputed sway. His larger cousin, the tiger, that once was here too, has been shot out or has retreated to the fastnesses of the distant jungles. So the panther has no foe but man to contend with. The cover, afforded by the sea of lantana shrub, the hundreds of rocky, boulder-strewn hills, the many crags, caverns and tunnels that exist on these hills, and the plentiful supply of food in the form of wild-pig, domestic cattle and goats, porcupines, peafowl and mouse-deer, make this region a paradise for panthers.

I had explored Kuppa Gudda hill many times before and knew that, roughly a hundred feet from the top and in a direction facing north-west, were two subterranean passages that burrowed straight into the hill. Also, that on the northeastern side, but rather higher, was a small cavern that funnelled into a passage sloping slightly downwards into the bowels of the earth. As likely as not this passage connected with one or both of the two subterranean passages I have mentioned the north-west, the distance across in a direct line being scarcely more than four hundred feet, which more or Jess represented the breadth of the hilltop from west to east, with perhaps double that distance running the other way, from north to south.

I had tried to reconnoitre these three passages on earlier occasions, but had desisted at the point when they had become too narrow and I had been forced to crawl on my stomach. For, unlike my father, I detest snakes, and Kuppa Gudda has quite a variety of them, together with large black rock-scorpions, six to eight inches in length, that hide under loose rocks and would be nasty customers to meet in a dark passage on one's stomach, with no means of avoiding them. These

crawling and creeping creatures annoy and disgust me, and I would much rather meet a panther than one of them.

Well, as I was saying, there were these three passages and it was pretty clear that if the lonely panther was on this hill at all, he would be in one of them. But, which one?

After pondering the situation, Chowdhri and I circumvented the base of the hill so as not to let the panther see us climbing up directly. We therefore ascended Kuppa Gudda by the southern side where I knew there were no caves. We then walked northwards again, along the hilltop, till we were standing directly above the place where the passages opened up. By walking to the edge of the hill, first north-westwards and then north-eastwards, we were able to overlook the mouths of the three passages.

Being a rocky hill, no tracks were visible anywhere, and it was soon apparent we were no nearer a solution of the problem than we had been by looking up at them from below. The only way to discover whether the panther was in any one of them was to go in and see. I decided to make a start on the two passages facing north-west.

Telling Chowdhri what I intended to do, I instructed him to return the way we had ascended and to go back to the road and await events from there. There was a chance that the panther might dash past me and I might wound him, when he would find an unarmed Chowdhri in his path and make short work of him. Or perhaps I might have to follow the panther and Chowdhri might come in the way of a flying bullet. It was better to get him out of the way.

Chowdhri reacted strongly against my instructions. He said it was a foolhardy scheme and he wanted to be on hand to help. But there was no better plan, so I ordered him to go. Still protesting vigorously, and with many backward appealing glances in my direction, he eventually disappeared beneath the rim of the hilltop to the south.

I waited for fifteen minutes after that, so that I might see him walking along the base of the hill to the road, where I had told him to go. But no figure passed, although I delayed another ten minutes, and I was compelled to reach the inevitable conclusion. The stupid, stubborn but staunch fellow had decided to disobey me. No doubt, he was seated behind a rock somewhere half-way down the hillside to the south, hoping that by being closer to me, he might be of some help if needed. It was a gallant action, but brought on me a greater responsibility in case the panther should run his way if I happened to wound it.

I scrambled down the hundred feet to the entrance of the first of the

north-western caves. Piled boulders formed the opening. On the soil between the boulders I searched for Pugmarks and found them. But they were not fresh by any means.

However, I knew this discovery meant nothing. The panther might be there all the time. Perhaps on more recent occasions he had approached and left the cave by passing over the tops of the boulders, thus leaving no fresh tracks on the earth at their bases.

Cautiously, I crept over the stones myself and then dropped silently on to the sloping rock that led into the darkened opening. My rubber-soled shoes made no sound against the rock as I crept forward, inch by inch, along the narrowing passage. Very soon I was bent double as the walls of the shaft closed in on all sides. Then I had to go down on my hands and knees. A few yards more and I would have to start crawling on my stomach.

Suddenly I felt very frightened! If the panther came out all of a sudden, there was no room for him to pass me, nor could any bullet stop his rush before he succeeded in mauling me severely, or even killing me.

Just then a plan came to my mind, so simple that I called myself several sorts of an idiot for not having thought of it before. So I began creeping back the way I had come, backing up the sloping rock and scrambling over the boulder at the entrance to the passage.

I had behind the boulder and then started putting the simple plan into effect. I made the harsh, sawing sound a panther makes when he calls. Three times I sawed, and then a fourth, watching the dark mouth of the tunnel before me and listening intently for the slightest sound.

There was none, nor did anything move. I called for fifteen minutes; louder now, but nothing happened. Clearly the panther was not in this cave.

Climbing back among the boulders, I scrambled over them for a distance of about fifteen yards to the entrance of the second passage, which was slightly smaller. I did not attempt to enter this tunnel, but lying down behind two boulders that provided a clear view of the entrance to the cave, below the point where they touched each other, I started sawing like a panther all over again. Then I realised that, if the panther was in this second cave, he would have heard me while I was calling at the first.

Nevertheless, I called for another twenty minutes until I was hoarse. Nothing stirred; not a sound came except the whistling of the breeze between the two boulders behind which I was lying. The panther was

not at home in this tunnel, either.

As silently as I had come, I withdrew, climbed the hill and sat on top of it awhile to rest my throat. Either the panther was in the remaining cave to the north-east or he was not on the hill at all.

The sun blazed down from a clear sky, and the rock on which I sat was so hot that within a little while I had to get up again. This made me impatient and I decided to tackle the remaining cave and have done with the job.

I have told you that the entrance to this cave was rather higher up the hill, but it did not take me very long to reach it.

A regular cavern existed here, the opening being about eight feet high by perhaps a dozen wide. There were no boulders at the entrance behind which to hide, but because of its size I could clearly look into the recess for at least twenty feet before it narrowed and became too dark to see further.

In the absence of boulders, I decided to sit to one side of the entrance, out of sight from within, and start my calling again. If you make noises imitating the grating call of a panther for over half-an-hour, as I had been doing, you will understand why I was hoarse, and why the sounds that came from me now might have resembled rather a crocodile than any panther you ever heard. But I did my best, though I was hardly optimistic enough to believe that they would receive any panther, even an inexperienced cub.

However, I continued making this noise every once in a while, peeping around the corner into the mouth of the cave more excitedly, more expectantly than ever. This was it; the panther had to be here, he was bound to come out.

But nothing came. No sound, no movement, nothing at all. I despaired, then. The lonely panther had outwitted me; he was not on Kuppa Gudda, after all.

At that moment I heard a very faint rustle. I stuck my head further around the corner to look more fully into the cave. Nothing moved inside and the sound had stopped. Then I heard it again. Very faintly, but a distinct rustle.

The solution came to me in a flash and I whipped around. There, behind me, a few feet away, was the lonely panther, his hind paws gathered beneath him for the spring, his eyes glowering with hate, and his lips parted in a silent snarl.

Wriggling to my knees, I fired hastily at that spite-filled face. The panther slithered forward a short distance, by which time I had struggled to my feet and put another shot into the back of his neck. The effect of the two heavy .470 bullets, so close to each other and at such close range, was devastating and reduced the head to a bloody pulp of brains, bone and flesh.

And so the lonely panther died, without making a sound and before he had had a chance to take his revenge. Those two faint rustling sounds he had made against the grass had betrayed his approach in the very nick of time.

Perhaps, after all, he might not have attacked me. To this day, I do not know where he came from that hot afternoon. Maybe he was hiding in one of the passages to the north-west all the time, had seen me but had not betrayed himself while I was calling at the entrance. Then, after I had left, perhaps he had followed me and, attracted by the queer sounds I was making, had crossed over the hilltop to investigate.

On the other hand, he might have sprung. Filled with hate and a desire for revenge, he may have been deliberately seeking his opportunity But all said and done, I was not happy over what had happened, beginning with the shooting of the pantheress that was about to have cubs, followed by the killing of her lonely mate. I wished I had never played a part in separating this devoted pair. Perhaps I am becoming a bit soft, like my dad!

8 The One-legged Dutchman of 'Wild Heritage'

I do not know why it should be so, but almost every Dutchman I know or have heard or read about, who has led an adventurous life, has only one leg, having lost the other in the course of his exploits.

Probably you have seen drawings or paintings of them, too, one-legged Dutch pirates with fierce moustaches and long beards, and even longer, curved cutlasses, which they brandish beneath a black banner with the skull and crossbones.

Lately I read about a famous one-legged Dutchman who had forty-eight wives - I think it was! What is more, he was fairly old, while they were all young! Now do not ask me how that worked out, for I am sure I do not know. However, to return to the story The Government of Holland disapproved of his harem and told this character that he would have either to dispense with forty-seven of his spouses or leave the country himself. The reply to this ultimatum was immediate. The Dutchman said he would quit - and take his forty-eight wives with him! The happy family went to Canada, where they became happier still. He married some more wives - and a few Red Indian squaws - and had in all over three hundred children!

The Dutchman I am going to tell you about in this story has only one leg - but he has not, so far as I know, half-a-hundred wives and several hundred children. Moreover he is not a pirate, nor even an adventurer, but a very respectable gentleman, a teaplanter from Ceylon. He had come to South India to satisfy a long-felt need among the many foreign tourists, wild-life enthusiasts and hunters who visit this country to see, hear and shoot the king of the Asiatic jungles - the tiger - in his own realm, together with some of the other magnificent species of wild animals we have here.

Captain Jonklaas hit on the wonderful idea of constructing a splendid hut right in the heart of the wilds, where he entertains visitors from the West in truly royal style, with the best of food, transportation, trackers, baits, machans, and above all the benefit of his unique experience and guidance on how to come to grips with a tiger.

This shack is built of giant bamboos throughout, with interwoven matting and a thatched roof. Jonklaas calls his place 'Wild Heritage', and I can think of no better name. For the surroundings are certainly wild enough, and the heritage with which he provides his guests during

their stay with him is that for which many unfortunates, confined for life to the humdrum existence of the city, so often pine-wide open spaces, animals, birds, flowers and trees, the scent of the jungle by day and its secret call by night - the roar of the tiger, the trumpeting scream of the wild bull-elephant, the fear-laden warning cries of the alarmed sambar and spotted-deer.

These come to the western visitor as he stands by his window at night and gazes into the darkness, lit only by the glitter of a thousand fire-flies, and wonders how close the authors of those fearful sounds might be.

'Wild Heritage' has a pretty little garden with jungle plants and shrubs; sitting in a comfortable cane chair under the thatch portico on a brilliant moonlight night, you may glimpse perhaps the slate-grey bulk of wild elephants lumbering towards the river only two hundred yards away, or perhaps busily engaged in breaking-down Jonklaas's bamboo fencing preparatory to trespassing into his garden. But you will have to look hard if you have never seen an elephant in moonlight before; for what you see does not resemble an elephant in the least. You will think that somehow some big boulders have suddenly been thrown into the garden, or perhaps you will think that the bushes seem to move in the ghostly and phosphorescent light.

'Wild Heritage' is situated in the pretty little hamlet of Mahvanhalla at the foot of the Nilgiri Mountains and on a plateau at about 3,000 feet above the sea, just fifteen miles from the hill-station of Ootacamund. Jungle surrounds it, an out-jutting spur of foothills from the main mountain range to the south providing excellent sport with tiger, bison and jungle-sheep in a westerly direction, while on the higher-crags the wily ibex, often called the 'saddle-back' , is to be found, offering a challenge to the stalking skill of the hunter. East of Mahvanhalla is the Segur River, and beyond that again are miles of almost virgin forest as far as the Moyar River and onwards to the jungles of the District of North Coimbatore.

This is the home of the elephant, the tiger and the panther, and their prey, the many herds of sambar, spotted deer, mid pig and jungle sheep that everywhere abound. Truly 'Wild Heritage' is in all respects a paradise to the visitor in search of excitement or quietude, with patient stalking, watching, photography or hunting, as the case may be.

The story I wish to tell you concerns the Captain's adventures when he set out to kill the crafty misogynist of Mahvanhalla, a lone male tiger who for years haunted the banks of the Segur River and the small Mahvanhalla stream that joins it from the west, and of how he met the

one-tusked rogue elephant who later killed Henderson, a well-known planter at Kilkotagiri in the Nilgiri Mountains, together with a few Kota aborigines.

Jonklaas, in spite of his great physical handicap, manages to get along well with the aid of an artificial leg. Whether this leg is of wood or aluminium I do not know, and have always felt too shy to ask him. But it enables him to drive his Standard car along impossible tracks in the jungle.

If there is no motorable way for the car, Jonklaas mounts one of the two shaggy ponies he stables at 'Wild Heritage' and away into the jungle he goes, perhaps for a whole night and day - maybe a couple of nights and days! Where does he go? I don't know, but judging by the pony's appearance when the Captain turns up, it has certainly covered a long distance

Many kinds of ladders are made in the jungle and used by hunters to get into the machans we construct high up in the trees. Of course, we dispense with such aids if possible and climb straight up the tree and into the machan. But this is not always possible if the tree has a bare trunk with no branches for some distance, or a wide base, or is thorny, or one has chosen a clump of bamboos, which is, incidentally, one of the worst places in which to tie a machan in elephant jungle.

When we do use ladders, we use a bit of ingenuity! Some of us have rope-ladders that we carry with us - parallel lengths of cotton rope with wooden rungs nine inches across and spaced a foot apart. Some of us make ladders on the spot, particularly in bamboo jungle, simply cutting down a giant stem and lopping off the fronds that jut out from the parent stem. Then all you have to do is rest the thicker end of the stem firmly on the ground and the other end against your machan and then climb up like a monkey, placing your hands and feet on the shortened stems of the fronds.

But the captain was handicapped, and he would make his Irila trackers construct a real ladder from two bamboo stems cut down and joined with rungs skilfully held in place by ropes and jungle vines. Up one of these ladders he would climb, when it was finished, to sit all night long, despite the discomfort of his missing leg, cramped in the machan but as silent and motionless as a graven image, till at dawn, the jungle-cocks would invite him to descend and hobble to his car where he had concealed it the evening before, perhaps half-a-mile away. Or, if the country was too difficult, the captain would arrive on pony-back at the machan with an attendant the evening before, then send the pony away with instructions to the tracker to return with it at break of day.

On visiting Mahvanhalla casually during a vacation from his tea-planting business at Ceylon, the captain had fallen in love with the place and had formed the habit of returning each year at the end of the Indian winter, to shoot his annual tiger. He tells me the jungles of Ceylon are beautiful in every way, but that they lack just one thing. Which to my jungly mind almost debars them from being classified as jungles in the proper sense - there are no tigers!

Having acquainted you with one of the main actors in this drama, and the locale in which it took place, I will now give you some insight into the nature and doings of the other main actor, which Jonklaas called 'the misogynist of Mahvanhalla'

He was a tiger that had formed the habit of visiting Mahvanhalla about once every three months, or a week or fortnight less at the most, as part of a 'beat' that, so far as the captain was able to ascertain from thc Irilas and Badagas in the vicinity, and the Karumbas a few miles farther north, had an extensive range.

This animal was reported to be active in the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary bordering the Moyar River, with its centre at the small Forest Chowki of Tippakadu, some eight miles to the north, whence he would work his way eastwards along the ravines of the Moyar River, skirting the dam that had been constructed at a place called Hundi, and then along the same river which here divided the Nilgiris from the jungles of Coimbatore District, to a village called Benur. That seemed to be the easternmost limit of his beat. From Benur, he made the return journey by closely skirting the base of the Nilgiri range, past Anaikutty Forest Lodge, the banana plantation at Segur, and thence in a north-westerly line along the Segur River to Mahvanhalla, where the tiger would 'camp', so to say, for ten days to a fortnight, before undertaking the last lap of the journey back to his starting point in the Mudumalai Sanctuary. This last lap lay along the Mahvanhalla Stream, which, as I have said, was a tributary of the Segur River, and then along the outskirts of the large township of Masinigudi, which is less than five miles from the Tippakadu Chowki in the Mudumalai Sanctuary, the latter constituting the western limit of this tiger's beat, more or less.

I am conscious of the fact that, when setting out a tiger's line of beat in such detail, many a reader will wonder how I come to be so precise about it. Well, so far as I am concerned, the answer is easy. The captain told me. But for him to glean this information, or for any other sportsman to do so, must have been extremely difficult, requiring much patient questioning and cross-questioning of dozens of aborigines that lived permanently in the forest - in this case, Irila herdsmen and

travellers who foregathered at the weekly fair, called a 'shandy', that was held every Sunday in Masinigudi town.

No doubt, the fact this mart was held each Sunday helped the captain in his task, for to it came practically every man, woman and child living within a radius of fifteen miles; they came for their weekly stock of rice and other grain, stores and necessities of every possible kind.

So Jonklaas went to the shandy himself on Sundays, hobbled around all day and asked everyone about the tiger and its habits and whereabouts. No detective in pursuit of a criminal could have been more painstaking than the captain, and so it came about that he was able to gather much information about this animal and its habits, and map out fairly accurately the route followed during the three months it took to complete the circuit and return to its starting point.

I have related in earlier stories how tigers generally wander over a wide area along a more or less definite course that has come to be called in local parlance a 'tiger-beat', in their search for food, which may consist of wild game - his natural prey - domestic cattle, which he readily eats as a substitute where and when game is scarce or unavailable, and human beings who are not his natural food, but upon whom he may learn to prey under exceptional or compelling circumstances.

The reason for this wide circuit is obvious. If the tiger remained in one locality, there would soon be nothing for him to eat. Some of it would be finished; what remained would be far too cautious to be caught napping. And the reason why tigers follow a more or less specific beat, and in many cases even the same paths, tracks, fire-lines and river courses, is equally obvious. By this method, he comes to learn the lie of the land. He remembers these things, and the geography of familiar places helps him in his hunting. Put a tiger in a jungle where he has never been before and he will be at a considerable disadvantage for some time in acquiring a knowledge of it and the localities where game or cattle are to be found.

For hunting, like everything else when practised and done to perfection, becomes a fine art, and the tiger is certainly a perfectionist.

The captain found out something more about this tiger that was quite unusual among tigers. Many of the Irilas and Kesavas whom he questioned at Masinigudi related that it had a habit of fighting with others of its own species, particularly young tigresses, and of killing and eating them. A Karumba and his wife, who were charcoal burners just within the Mysore State border, three miles from Tippakadu, reported that two tigers had begun a fight one night and had kept it up

for nearly two hours. Next morning the man stumbled upon the body of a dead tigress within a furlong of their hut. It had been killed and partly devoured by a tiger, whose large pugmarks were to be seen everywhere around the carcass.

Irilas and Kesavas from distant Benur told much the same story, while the watchman of the Forest Bungalow at Anaikutty said that one evening, when he went down the hill on which the bungalow stands to fill his water-pot at the river that winds around the base of the hill, he was surprised by a tigress that broke cover on the opposite bank and started lapping water without paying the least attention to him.

Too terrified to do anything for fear that the slightest movement on his part might advertise his presence, he stood petrified behind the trunk, when the problem was solved for him by a tiger that suddenly pounced upon the drinking female from behind.

Pandemonium reigned as the infuriated felines roared, bit and tumbled over each other in a fight to the death. Seizing the opportunity afforded him by their preoccupation, the watchman fled back to the bungalow and locked himself inside the outhouse that formed his home. Through the bared and closely shuttered window, the sounds of the fighting could be heard, followed within half-an-hour by the dying one of the combatants.

He would not venture forth the next morning for fear of meeting the survivor, but on the following day, when a flock of vultures began to soar and circle in the sky above, and he heard the whir and rattle of the wind against their pinions as they rocketed to earth to feast, the watchman knew that one of the felines was dead.

Timidly he ventured forth, stepping warily towards the spot where the scavengers of the sky were foregathering and there he came upon the torn remnants of the tigress, more than three-quarters devoured by the tiger that had put an end to her.

Hearing these stories, the captain forthwith nicknamed tiger the 'Misogynist of Mahvanhalla', a very appropriate indeed, although the animal was by no means restricted to that little hamlet.

Except for his tendency to kill and devour the females of his own species, this tiger appeared to be a perfect. He harmed no single human being; in fact he totally ignored the presence of the few people who happened to meet him in the jungle or along some lonely road or track. Cattle and buffaloes he did destroy and in plenty, but in the few instances where the herdsmen plucked up enough courage to attempt to drive him away from the animal, he had just killed, he responded

with a thunderous growl that put them to immediate flight, without attempting to follow up his advantage by adding them to his menu.

Having acquired all this in the course of visits to 'Wild Heritage', and after painstakingly plotting the tiger's beat on a map of the area, with dates, as closely as he could discover them from his many informants, Jonklaas was able to foretell to within a fortnight either way the probable date of the tiger's next visit to the vicinity of the Mahvanhalla hamlet, where he made up his mind he would shoot the animal. Leaving a greater safety margin of a month, in addition to the 28-day plus or minus period already arrived at by a study of his map, Jonklaas began operations from 'Wild Heritage' in a truly methodical manner.

He began his plan of attack by purchasing four young buffaloes and tied them out as bait approximately at the four points of the compass, each within a two-mile radius of 'Wild Heritage'. In each case, a machan was erected above the bait, under the captain's personal supervision.

The heifer to the north was tied on the bank of the Mahvanhalla Stream which, as I have told you, is a tributary of the Segur River. That to the east was tied on the bed of a sandy nullah in which the pugmarks of this and other tigers were frequently found. The third heifer was placed at the margin of a grassy glade, bound by the Segur River on one side and dense bamboo jungle on the other three, directly south of the captain's hut and almost twelve furlongs away. The fourth and last bait was tied on the lower slopes of the spur of hills to the west of Mahvanhalla, and was the most distant of the four baits, being at least two miles away.

That night the captain could not sleep, so filled was he with anticipation as to the success of his plans and getting a 'kill' in at least one of the four spots. But the morning brought disappointments, as so often happens with live baits and tigers.

All four heifers were alive.

Dutchmen as a rule are a stubborn race to the point of inflexibility, and Jonklaas proved no exception. Night after night he tied his buffaloes in the predetermined positions, taking care to change the heifers about. His idea was, that if a tiger had been secretly visiting any of the baits and observing them at a distance without killing, due to suspicion at finding the bait tied up instead of free, he would at least encounter a different beast each time. The captain reasoned that this would help so to allay his misgivings that at last he would kill and eat one of them.

In addition, the captain resolved to sit up each night in a different

machan in rotation, so as to familiarise himself with all four of them in anticipation of that much-anticipated day when the tiger he was after would at last decide to make a kill. With this in view, he set forth at about three o'clock one afternoon on one of his ponies, bound for the machan he had tied to the south of 'Wild Heritage' where, as I have told you, the Segur River flowed past on one side and with bamboo jungle on the other three.

I think you will be more interested in hearing what happened that memorable night if I let Captain Jonklaas tell the story in his own words:

'As you know, Anderson, it is very difficult to select any particular spot for a bait and machan and say, with certainty that your tiger will kill there. It is largely a matter of luck, the rest being left to the whims of the tiger. But in my experience, or at least as I have found things in the Nilgiri areas, it's a mistake to keep changing your machan. I used to do that myself once, only to find that just after I had moved my machan to another spot, pugmarks would reveal in a day or two that a tiger had passed directly beneath the tree where I had been sitting before.

'That's how it came about that, after having spent several sleepless nights on each of the other machans, I set out from "Wild Heritage" on one of the ponies at about three o'clock in the afternoon for the machan near the Cheddar Patti, which bad been my first choice. I took Banta, the tracker, along with me to bring the pony back.

'The last time I visited this machan, I had used my Standard, as the path to within a furlong is motorable, concealing the car after that among the young boram shrubs growing around that tall babul tree beneath the Cheddar Patti and the river where, two years ago, you and I took pictures of the she-bear and her cub feeding in the evening. From there I walked to the machan. During the night a herd of elephants crossed the river, and from my position I could hear them breaking branches and smashing the borams as they grazed towards the spots where I had parked the Standard. Being painted a horrible salmon Colour, I knew they were bound to catch sight of it, so that in all probability by morning it would resemble a squashed sardine-tin rather than a car. That reminds me; I must have the damned thing repainted khaki, or green, or both, to make it less conspicuous. Jungle camouflage, you know!

'I waited with my heart in my mouth for the sounds of the car being broken to pieces, but wonderful to relate, the elephants left it alone although they came to within a hundred yards. That's the reason why I used the pony on this occasion.

'Well, to continue. Banta had tied this machan quite twenty feet off the ground on a clump of bamboos. Like you, I dislike machans on bamboo-clumps, but I must give the fellow credit for having made a wonderful job of this one. To begin with, the ladder leading to it was a most elaborate affair, the rungs being quite close to each other, so that I had no difficulty going up or down with my one leg. And there was room enough for at least four people on the machan itself. It was very comfortable

'Nothing happened till about eleven o'clock, when a tiger started roaring on the other side of the river. Judging from the sound, he was within a couple of hundred yards of where I was sitting.

'Almost immediately, an elephant began to trumpet—you know, that high-pitched note of anger and fear they make when they can't decide just what to do. And every time the tiger roared, the elephant would scream in return.

'It was amusing and exciting, too, for although the tiger did not appear to be coming any nearer, there was no doubt that the elephant was. The tiger continued to roar and the tusker to scream as he came closer and closer, and very soon after that, with a mighty crashing and swishing of bamboos behind me, Jumbo announced his arrival on the scene.

'Things began to happen after that! Why this elephant was so upset at the tiger's roars I cannot imagine, but there was no doubt he was either scared stiff of stripes or in a right royal rage - perhaps a mixture of both.

'He trumpeted repeatedly, the sound blasting my ear-drums as he floundered around the bamboo-clump on which I was sitting and then came face to face with my buffalo bait! I could see that he had but one tusk, for it shone a dead white against his dark bulk.

'The poor buffalo must have been terrified to death, what with the tiger's roars and the noise the elephant was making, I heard a strangled mooing and a stamping of hooves as it stained and struggled desperately to break the tethering rope.

'That's when the elephant saw it!

'I forgot to tell you that it was a day or two after full-moon. The scene that was now enacted below me was plainly visible in spite of the speckled shadows thrown by the tossing stems of bamboos in the grove where I was seated.

'In his blundering rush, the elephant almost collided with the heifer

before he saw it. Then he braked by swerving sharply, at the same time letting out a shriek even more shrill than the sounds he had been making for the last fifteen minutes.

'His behaviour after that was indeed extraordinary. He scraped the ground sharply up and down with his right forefoot, gathering the sand that accumulated with his trunk and throwing it in the direction of the heifer. He ran quickly up to the buffalo, stopping dead within a foot, and then backed ludicrously, chucking up the sand as before. He did this two or three times, and I decided that within a minute or two he would gore or trample my poor bait to death.

'I thought of shooting the elephant, but it would have led to a hell of a lot of trouble with the forestry people, as he was not a proscribed rogue at that time. I would have lost my licence, with a heavy fine into the bargain.

'The next moment the problem was taken out of my hands and transferred to the elephant in a most unexpected way. For who should step out of the undergrowth on the other side of the heifer, but the tiger himself!

'If the elephant was excited before, he now became rabid! He rapped the end of his trunk against the ground thrice, making that noise you must have heard that resembles a zinc sheet being folded quickly in half, and swung around to face the tiger. The latter was half-crouching, watching both the heifer and the elephant. I could almost understand what was passing through his brain. He was hungry and wanted to eat the buffalo, but the close presence of that hysterical mountain of flesh deterred him.

'After a few moments the tiger decided to shoo away this unwelcome onlooker and began a series of shattering roars that shook the very machan on which I was seated. In return, Jumbo backed to the opposite end of the clearing and screamed and trumpeted his loudest. You can imagine the din that ensued.

'All this time I could easily have shot the tiger, but decided not to do so, for, by the way things were shaping, it appeared that a battle royal between the two beasts was imminent, and that was something I wanted to see very much.

'The tiger was the first really to lose his temper. With a coughing roar he charged the elephant, but as he reached to within a few feet and was about to spring upon its head or back, the elephant reared on to his hind legs, as we see them do in circuses, and then descended to earth again in an attempt to crush the tiger beneath his forefeet or

catch him with his trunk.

'But Stripes was too quick! He jumped aside nimbly, stood on his hind legs in turn, and flailed the elephant's trunk with a rapid right and left with the outstretched talons of his front paws.

'Jumbo squealed, curled in his trunk out of harm's way, and madly charged the tiger in turn, trying to impale him with his single tusk.

'But it was a vain hope. Once again the tiger side-stepped, and this time leaped over that threatening tusk directly on to the elephant's forehead, where he clung tightly, holding on grimly with his teeth and the talons of his forepaws in the thick hide of the elephant's neck, while the claws of his hind legs raked the upper sides of the unfortunate beast's trunk.

'The fight was lost and over then, but for the fact that, in his desperate attempt to get rid of the intruder tearing at his neck and trunk, the elephant now did the correct thing. Bending down, he practically stood upon his head, bringing the enormous weight of his body to bear upon the tiger.

'In a last-minute endeavour to escape that terrible pressure, the tiger let go, now concentrating all his efforts in trying to wriggle out from underneath. He succeeded to a degree and was half-free, when one of the elephant's groping forefeet came down upon him.

'Feeling his victim at last beneath his foot, the infuriated elephant took full advantage of the situation. He jerked his head free from the loosened grip of the tiger, at the same time putting his remaining front foot down upon the other end of the tiger's body. He now had his victim helplessly squashed beneath him.

'The tiger's roars had changed to horrible, gurgling gasps when that terrible trunk uncurled itself, got underneath the body of the tiger between the two ends that were pinioned to the earth beneath those mighty feet, and heaved upwards with a sudden tremendous tug.

'The next moment I saw a sickening sight. So great was the rage and strength of that elephant that he tore the tiger's body into three pieces, the portion held in the folds of his trunk parting from the other two ends under his feet, and coming away in a red, gory mass.

'Still trumpeting madly, and with blood pouring down the sides of his own head and neck, the monster thrashed the middle section of tiger furiously against the ground while not attempting to remove either of his forefeet from the remaining two sections. Undoubtedly he feared they might come to life again and do him more harm.

'When nothing remained of the middle section beyond a bundle of sand-covered fragments, the elephant started rubbing his forefeet, one at a time, with a part of the tiger beneath each of them, against the ground, very soon reducing both parts to shreds. He worked hard at this, in a towering rage as the bites and scratches inflicted by his dead antagonist pained him, till all traces of the tiger had practically disappeared. Not content, he kneeled on the ground to ram his one tusk into those pulpy pieces, and brought it out again with flesh and blood dripping from the end.

'At that moment he looked up and noticed the unfortunate heifer once more.

'I could read the malice in his evil brain as he screamed. But there was no fear this time in his voice - only a ring of triumph and a note of hate. The buffalo would have been to pieces the next moment had I not switched on the torch fixed to my rifle and fired a shot into the air.

'That was where I made my mistake, Andy. By switching on the torch. Firing the shot alone would have driven him away. But switching on the light was a silly thing to do. Flushed as he was with his recent victory over the tigers, and in pain from the wounds, that damned elephant reacted differently to any other I have known. He came straight for the bamboo clump on which I was sitting and began to demolish it systematically.

'Fortunately, the first stem he seized in that deadly trunk of his was not one of those directly supporting my machan. He pulled it towards him with a jerk and it snapped with a tremendous twang. I knew that the next frond he broke would bring down my machan. There seemed no alternative but to shoot the beast and incur endless trouble with the Forest Department people.

'As a last resort, I tried firing over the elephant again. But this time I realised my mistake and extinguished the torch as I did it, firing two shots, one after the other.

'Luckily that seemed to change his mind. He trumpeted defiantly, but discretion got the better part of valour and he turned aside into the jungle to crash his way through. I could hear the noise of his departure for a long time after that. His screams, and the sound of a tree being pushed over, or a branch being torn off as he gave vent to his rage, marked the departure of that dreadful monster, till silence reigned at last and I was left alone with the cowering heifer and the torn fragments of what had, till recently, been a mighty tiger. This is an episode I shall never forget.

'Months later, it was this same tusker that gored poor Henderson to death at Kilkotagiri, after killing several coolies on his estate. By then he had been proscribed as a 'rogue' and was eventually shot, but I wish I had killed him the night he killed the tiger. It would have saved Henderson's life.

'But not always do tigers behave as rashly as this one did,' the captain continued. 'Let me tell you of another incident I witnessed in daylight that throws quite a new light on a tiger's abilities so far as his thinking processes are concerned. This story has an unexpected sequel and happened while I was waiting for the "misogynist" to take one of my four baits.

'By way of a change from sitting in a machan every night, I rode out on a pony after an early lunch one afternoon, over the spur of that hill to the west and into the valley beyond. It is about four miles, as the crow flies. There I had constructed a machan at the side of a clearing commanding a view of a wide stretch of valley and plain below me, as I wanted to take pictures, if possible, of the herds of bison and spotted-deer that were reported by the Irila trackers to be in the habit of grazing together at the edges of the clearing. I sent the pony away with the man who had accompanied me, with instructions that he should bring it back at 5.30 pm sharp.

'I suppose I must have been there an hour, when I noticed the black form of a huge bull bison emerge from the jungle within 150 yards and come out on to the clearing, grazing peacefully all the while. I was admiring him and getting the movie-camera ready, when a movement beyond caught my eye.

'Staring intently to discover what it was, and expecting to see another bison, I was surprised to make out the slinking form of a tiger, half-hidden at the edge of the clearing and watching the bison's every movement. The latter was obviously quite unaware of the tiger, who was down-wind, and continued to keep his head lowered as he grazed.

'I knew that normally a tiger would not attack such a formidable opponent, so I decided against shooting the tiger and made up my mind to watch what would happen next and take pictures.

'Well, that tiger did an amazing thing. He deliberately broke cover, walked a foot or two into the open clearing and stood there, his tail jerking from side to side behind him.

'The bull bison saw him all right, or perhaps caught the motion with the corner of his eye. He wheeled, faced the tiger, and made the shrill, whistling sound bison do when they are alarmed.

'The tiger remained where he was. The only action on his part was the continuing jerk of that restless, swishing tail.

'The bison snorted and began to paw the ground with one of his forefeet. I could plainly read the signs. He was preparing to charge. And the next moment came the charge. With lowered head and outstretched horns, he went straight for the tiger.

'The latter stood stock still. I was amazed. But when the bull was almost upon him, he jumped nimbly aside while the bison, unable to stop himself, crashed slap into the trunk of a tree directly behind.

'Dazed but game, the bison wheeled around, looking confusedly for his enemy. The tiger was bounding across the clearing to its opposite end, as if in flight. But as he reached the base of a large tree growing there he stopped, faced the bison again, and stood stock still as before except for that restless, twitching tail.

'The bison stared, lowered his head, snorted and charged. Once more the tiger side-stepped in the nick of time, and once again the bull collided with the tree that had been behind the tiger.

'Believe it or not, Andy, that bison was stupid! Twice more he allowed the tiger to fool him, and twice again he bashed into a tree at the end of his charge. I was very interested and excited to see the outcome of this strange battle, and so did not shoot the tiger. But, man, I had the movie going all the time! Those pictures are worth thousands of dollars!

'At the end of the fourth crash, the bison was in a sorry state. His forehead and face were covered with blood and he was clearly exhausted and dizzy, breathing heavily and almost tottering on his feet.

'And then the tiger charged. In a flash he got behind the bison, and with a combination of teeth and talons hamstrung the unfortunate but gallant beast in the twinkling of an eye. With a hollow, mournful groan that mighty body collapsed backward and the victorious, cunning tiger sprang in for the kill, worrying the bison's throat.

'It was too much for me, Andy! I couldn't stand the horrible sight! I shot the brute and then put the dying bison out of his misery. When my tracker returned with the pony, he was astounded to see those two mighty creatures lying side by side.

'And now comes the anti-climax to my story. I waited in vain for the 'misogynist" to kill one of my tie-ups. He never did! Nor did he ever come to Mahvanhalla again! For the tiger I had shot was the

"misogynist" though I had no idea of that at the time.

'Only later, when the brute failed to put in his accustomed appearance, did I put two and two together and come to this conclusion. I think I am right. For you will agree, that tiger was an exceptionally aggressive beast to tackle a bull-bison. But his method was undeniably ingenious. And this happened precisely at the time at "misogynist" was due at Mahvanhalla.'

Before leaving the Captain, let me quickly relate yet one more of the unusual occurrences that happened near 'Wild Heritage', as he told it to me on another day.

'Do you know, Andy,' he began, 'your habit of walking about unarmed in the jungle is one that you should stop. At least, so far as this particular area is concerned. I know that tigers as a rule are quite harmless. But some of them here are unpredictable. Did I tell you what happened to my son, Rodney?

'He came to "Wild Heritage" about a year ago on holiday, to spend a month with me,

'Report came in one day that a tiger had killed a bull belonging to one of the neighbouring Irila herdsmen and had dragged it up a nullah into a dense shola at the further end. The spot was ideal for a beat, and my son decided to try one.

'Placing stops all along the top of the two banks of the nullah, he sent a party of about twenty men to beat the shola from above, and work downwards to the bed of the nullah. He himself sat on a hastily-prepared machan at the end, where the ravine joined a yet larger one.

'All Went according to plan, except for two things. But they were mighty important! The first was that no large tree happened to be growing at the spot which Rodney had selected for his machan. The only one turned out to be a sapling, and so his machan was only eight or nine feet from the ground. The second thing that happened I'll tell you about in a moment.

'The beat started, and as the yelling men approached, Rodney heard first one and then another strike his axe against the branch of the tree in which he was seated, to keep the tiger moving down the bed of the nullah till it reached the confluence with the larger one, where Rodney was sitting. My son knew the tiger was coming and prepared for an easy shot.

'Well, the tiger suddenly appeared. Rodney aimed, and pressed the trigger.

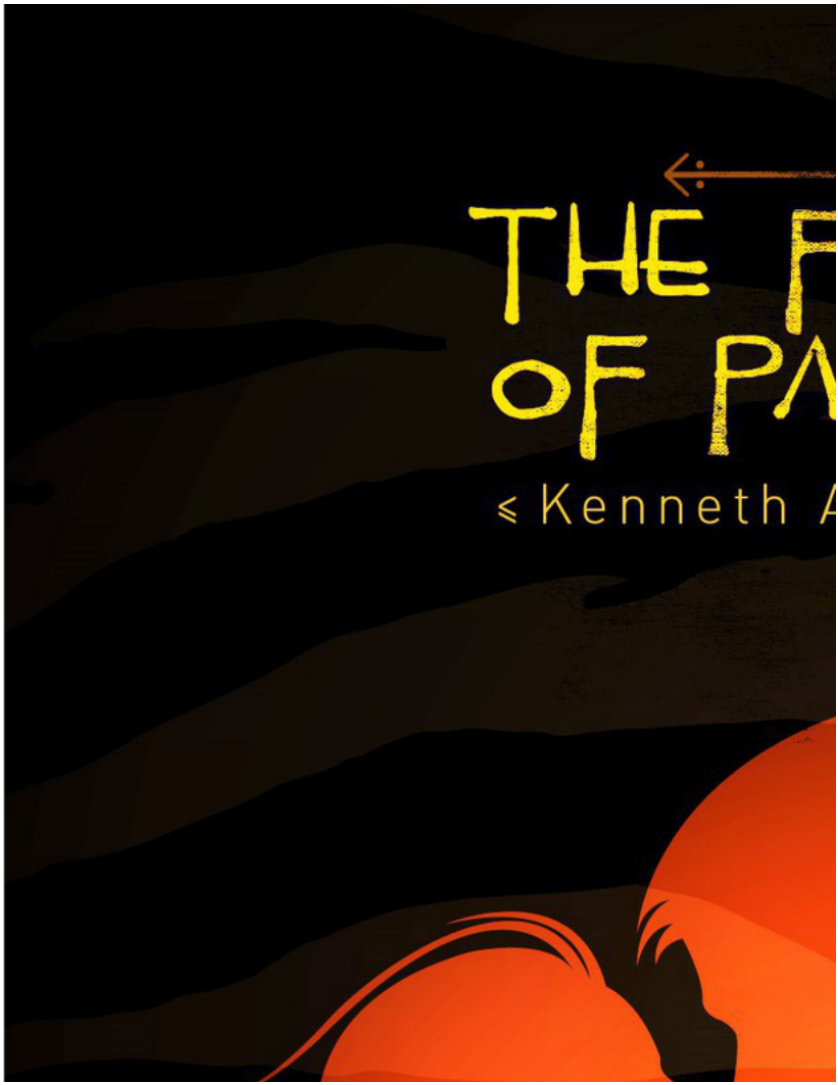
'But nothing happened! That was the second thing that went wrong with the plan, Andy. A misfire!

'The tiger then did a strange thing. He heard the click of the striker, looked up quickly, saw Rodney, and all in one movement sprang at him. As I told you, my son was not more than eight or nine feet off the ground.

'But then he did not know my son,' the Captain concluded proudly. 'Rodney was ready for him. Fortunately he was armed with a double-barrelled weapon, and the bullet from the second barrel caught the tiger full between the eyes, and that was the end of him.'

Then the Captain glanced at me with a mischievous smile, and slapped me on the thigh.

'Had it been that ancient single-barrelled blunderbuss of yours, Andy, which I have so very often advised you to present to the nearest museum, it would have been quite a different story!'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Kenneth A

Cover: Akshay Shetty

The names of all the characters portrayed in this book are entirely fictitious and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental and unintentional.

If you are interested to know more about Kenneth Anderson, feel free to join a group on Facebook dedicated to him

https://www.facebook.com/groups/kennethanderson/

If you have any questions, comments or feedback, you could write to joshuamathew@gmail.com

An introduction by Michael Ludgrove

My interest in Kenneth Anderson coincided with my research into my father's early life in Bangalore, a city I have only recently come to know. In my collection, I have two large group portraits of Bishop Cotton Boys School Reunions from the early 1930s. They include my father, Donald Ludgrove and his brother, Charles. Some time ago, a friend identified some of the others in the photographs. He identified Kenneth Anderson standing next to my father in both photographs. They looked similar, linen suits, carrying solar topis. I assumed that they would have known each other and would have shared some social background. I had heard of Kenneth Anderson and his jungles stories of man-eating tigers. I thought that if I knew something about Anderson, then this would also relate to the formative years of my father's life in Bangalore.

I have had a long career at Christie's Fine Art Auctioneers specialising in Rare Books and Manuscripts, for 15 years in their London saleroom and then 8 years in their Sydney and Melbourne, Australia saleroom. I have a large collection of Anglo Indian memorabilia through my association with the London and International world of Rare Books, and also co-authored a history of the Anglo Indians, which is yet to be published. I have first editions of all of Kenneth Anderson's jungle story books. But his jungle books shed little light on the man himself and his background. I then discovered his least known book, The Fires of Passion. It all began to fall into place.

Kenneth Anderson is best known for the books he has written on hunting and shooting with gun and camera in the forests of South India, particularly those of the former Princely state of Mysore. His accounts of the forest dwellers, their lives and culture are detailed and significant since much of this aspect of South India has long since disappeared. Most popular are the eight books he wrote in the 1950s and 1960s on the tracking and hunting of man-eating tigers and leopards; he also told stories of rogue elephants, gaur, wild dogs, bears, snakes and also of the human forest dwellers. He has been compared to Jim Corbett (1875-1955), who did for the forests of the Himalayan foothills in Kumaon and Garwhal in India's north, what Anderson did for the forest life of South India. In his

own introduction to one of his jungle adventure books The Tiger Roars, Anderson says' *I merely wish to make a plea for their preservation, that their wildlife and their beauty may survive … that future generations may enjoy them as I have done.'*

Anderson's least-known work is The Fires of Passion. However, for him, it might have been the most important. In correspondence with his publishers, George Allen and Unwin [now archived at Reading University in Berkshire, England] between 1961-1963, he refers to it as his "dream novel" at which he made two attempts. Unfortunately, it did not attract as much interest from his English publishers as his non-fiction hunting books had. Those were produced with many photographs, illustrations and dramatically illustrated dust wrappers. Some also went into foreign translations with their own illustrations. His publisher, Allen and Unwin, sent the manuscript of The Fires of Passion to other English publishers as well, including Robert Hale and Putnam and apparently, all of them rejected it. It was finally published in India in 1969, by Jaico of Delhi, unlike his other works, in nondescript paper wrappers in a small format (6.5 x 4.5 in.), 32 brief chapters covering 241 pages. The book itself has never been reprinted, unlike his other hunting stories. The first edition is now extremely rare and difficult to acquire.

Its importance lies in that it is a semi-autobiography in novel form. Anderson's social background and his own personality come through in elements of some of the book's characters. The Fires of Passion is Anderson's attempt at identifying and analyzing the community to which he belonged – the Anglo-Indians. The Indian magazine Frontline Volume 27 – Issue 06: March 13-26, 2010, published by The Hindu newspaper, carried an article by Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed. He describes Anderson as a "sixth-generation Anglo-Indian of Scottish descent whose connections with the imperial class were far more tenuous or completely non-existent. One of his lesser known novels, The Fires of Passion, discusses the Anglo-Indian dilemma in India and he contextualizes the Anglo-Indian as inhabiting a middle-ground and being despised both by the British imperialists and by the Indians". This is a somewhat hackneyed phrase, quite inaccurate in its sweeping generalization but all too easily used by writers to contextualize the complex situation occupied by the Anglo Indian in India.

The Anglo-Indian community in India, at any time in its history, has been a complex amalgam of the other communities in India, both European and Indian. The term Anglo-Indian was originally applied mainly in the eighteenth-century to Englishmen who had spent considerable time in India. Later, it was officially adopted by the mixed-race community of India. Earlier, they had been known by a variety of terms including Eurasian, East Indian and, contentiously, half-caste. This community was mainly of mixed English and Indian descent, though the term Anglo-Indian came to be applied equally to those of other European descent, such as French, German, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese and others. During Anderson's period, the term 'Domiciled European' was also used, applying to long established British businessmen and to time-expired British soldiers with permission to live in India. Thus, the Anglo-Indian Association of South India was known as the Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Association of South India. The several terms were frequently and interchangeably used during Anderson's period, particularly in cosmopolitan Bangalore, which had been a British garrison city since 1791. Often, there was no easy distinction between the terms; social structures and cultural values often coincided and became indistinguishable. Generally, the Anglo Indians belonged to the lower end of Raj society, but their strong feelings of Britishness often combined with a passionate affinity for India. Bangalore, and Anderson's world, apart from the British and Anglo Indian societies included Syrian Christians from Travancore (Kerala), Mangaloreans from the Malabar coast, Armenians, Parsis, Jews, Goans, Indian Christians, as well as the majority Hindus and Muslims, who in turn had their own different castes and creeds.

The conflicting attitudes of these communities were heightened during the imminent independence of India, when loyalties to one side or another were also tested. Set in post-war pre-independent India of 1946 The Fires of Passion tells the story of these tensions between the Indians, British and, Anderson says, "A third community also figured in this picture of opposing and conflicting emotions. Insignificant in numbers compared to the Indian population, they exceeded the British throughout the land. They were the Anglo-Indians, descendants of the early English settlers. A few of these families of pioneers had contrived to marry each other. Their offspring remained white in colour. The majority had either intermarried with, or kept Indian women, resulting in progeny who

were dark in skin. They were the Eurasians. But along with the fewer families who had more or less maintained pure English descent, all were classed as Anglo-Indians. But socially the average Englishman ostracized the Anglo-Indians, even the white ones'.

Anderson provides an example of this 'ostracism', or racism in the form of Ruth Cleveland, the recently arrived planter's wife from England. She meets June Gardner, the Anglo-Indian daughter of Neville Gardner, the Forest Ranger, and she questions *"You and Mr. Gardner – you're Eurasians, are you not?" June replies "We're Anglo-Indians". "Is that so?" Ruth mused "Eurasians and Anglo-Indians – what exactly is the difference?"... After some hesitation she explained. " Eurasians are the descendants of English people who married Indians, while Anglo-Indians come from English stock who have settled and lived in India for a long time – like Dad and myself ." … "But how is it you are brown?" … spoken quite unintentionally, the words went home. June turned a coppery red as she blushed beneath her tan. Tears of shame welled in her eyes. She tried to reply, but could not."*

Ruth typifies a certain type of colonial Raj *Memsahib* , who leads a bored, drunken life, divorced from her husband's work and having affairs. [The writer, Doris Lessing, described this life vividly in her novels, though they were set in the colonial society of Rhodesia]. Later, in an angry confrontation with Ruth's husband, John Greystone, June accuses *"whether she meant it or not, she has shown how you English people feel towards us. You despise us because we're dark. I'm a half-caste Eurasian girl. There is Indian blood in my veins."* Greystone himself is a second generation `white' Anglo Indian. His father built the plantation house he lives in.

The heightened tensions are further exacerbated by the background of the political struggle for Indian independence. It was a very difficult period of adjustment for the Anglo-Indians, many of whom would not find it as easy to leave independent India as their British benefactors and protectors would. Historically, they had always considered themselves British; part of the 'British in India', part of the dominant culture of their British fathers. In all Britain's wars and struggles in India, going back to the Mutiny of 1857 and beyond to the Black Hole of Calcutta, the Anglo-Indians had been on the British side, working for the empire; fighting, suffering and dying for it as much as the British had. Now that the British were leaving India the Anglo Indians felt isolated and threatened.

Perhaps Anderson saw himself as a mixture of Neville Gardner and John Greystone and, increasingly, as Robert Nicholson, the soon-to-be retired District Superintendent of Police, who was planning his departure for `home'. Further to the north, from an earlier generation, Jim Corbett was also preparing to leave India at independence. He had done for the forests of the Himalayan foothills of Kumaon and Garwhal in India's north, what Anderson did for South India. As Corbett himself said "See, all our people are leaving, there would be no one left to bury us if we stay here". Corbett and his sister Maggie left India in December 1947.

The major influence on Anderson and the inspiration for this work would appear to be John Masters's novel Bhowani Junction published in 1954. This was based on Masters's experience as a British Officer in India. The book was produced as a big-budget Hollywood film, shot in Lahore and England in 1955, which had an India-wide release in 1956. The dramatic film told a story of interracial love, passion and intrigue, set against the background of India's freedom struggle. Anderson began work on The Fires of Passion a few years later, the human drama of which is centred by the hunt for a man-eating tiger. Another jungle adventure film Harry Black and the Tiger was also shot in India, starring Stewart Granger. Anderson's son, Donald, was a stunt double for Granger in the film, which was released in 1958. Jim Corbett's Man-Eaters of Kumaon had earlier been released, in 1948, as a Hollywood film. Another, even earlier discovery, was that of Sabu, the young mahout from Mysore Palace. He went on to star in many Hollywood jungle adventure films in the 1930s and 1940s. His last film, A Tiger Walks, was released in 1964, the year after his death. Other influences in the popular imagination of many young Anglo Indian boys and men of the time were literary, comic and jungle adventure film characters such as Tarzan and Jungle Jim, the latter being mentioned on page 28 of The Fires of Passion. These stories were freely available in school libraries and on Railway Station news stalls throughout India.

Anderson had been planning to go `home' for some time. In his publisher Rayner Unwin's letter of 18th October 1961 to Anderson, he says *`I am most interested to hear that you have decided to get yourself a house in England and of course we will advance you the money you want'* . He gives Anderson details of the amount owed to

him from Call of the Man-eater. However, two months later Anderson's circumstances seem to have changed considerably. In his letter of 4th December 1961, he is telling Rayner Unwin that *`there has been quite an unforeseen disruption in my family since I last wrote to you which has forced me to postpone my plans of coming to England for some time. Donald and I have to alter all our arrangements now, and we hope to dispose of our properties and leave India together for good. By the earlier plan, I was to have come ahead'.*

The failure of The Fires of Passion to attract an English publisher and, therefore, wider recognition, would have been a great disappointment to him. The rejected manuscript was returned to him in September 1963. This was shortly after his `family disruption' which prevented him from leaving for England and would have added to his sense of failure.

An intriguing handwritten postscript to Anderson's letter of 4th December 1961 to Rayner Unwin suggests that there was a possible venture with the popular BBC naturalist, David Attenborough. Anderson writes *`please inform Miss Joy Hill to tell Mr. Attenborough of the B.B.C. of the change in my plans in case he visits India'.* If a television programme with the celebrity Attenborough and Anderson and India's South Indian wildlife had materialized then Anderson's legacy to India, to his followers and those who have enjoyed his books would have been dramatically different. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Perhaps it was as Robert Nicholson says in The Fires of Passion before his departure for England *`I longed to go home for good. But now that the time has come, I feel a strange void within me for which I cannot account, because … I loved her[India], the reality of parting with her forever has brought me face to face with myself and the make-believe I had built up around me'.* And now his cancer had also appeared. Kenneth Anderson died a few years later, in 1974. He is buried in the quiet of Hosur Road cemetery in Bangalore. It is a serene place, disturbed only by the occasional chirp of birds and the appearance of a lone figure or two in search of a long-dead ancestor. It is far from the animals and forest dwellers of the India he loved so much. But he does have company. He is buried among his own people – the Anglo Indians.

Michael Ludgrove
Curator, Art & Antiques,

Royal House of Mysore,
Bangalore Palace
1st September 2015

About This Story

"*Arre bhai! Bagh ku Khabardar!* "

"Brother! Beware of the tiger! The shades of night have fallen. The man-eater will get you!"

The tidings are carried from one little hut to another in hushed whispers. Never spoken aloud. Has not the man-eater ears that hear everywhere? They are in trees of the forest, in the air, in the privacy of a man's home. If they are not the tiger's ears, they are those of his secret agents, the spirits of the jungle. Then will come terrible vengeance upon the man or woman who dared to mention his name. That person will surely die.

The jungles of India know no greater terror than a man-eating tiger; and when that animal takes up his abode near a plantation and every now and then eats one of the coolies working on it, fear spreads everywhere. Work comes to a halt.

It all happened in the days of renascent India. The teeming millions of the land had spent two centuries under British rule and had never been united till an insignificant little man, preaching a ridiculous doctrine of freedom from the foreign yoke, bound them together.

His name was Mahatma Gandhi!

Everything admired him; even his enemies, the British! Outwardly they smiled in contempt, disdainfully calling him a half-naked fakir. Among themselves, they acknowledged his courage.

Others were watching the dramatic scene. Some were patriots, imbued with a fiery zeal. They wanted to free their motherland by force and throw the accursed while man into the sea whence he came. There were yet others who wanted violence and adopted it. But for their own ends. Opportunists they really were but termed themselves Communists. They wrecked trains and committed murders. By their eloquence, they swayed mobs of peaceful men and fanned their passions to a white-hot fury. The rabble did the rest. Loot and pillage were committed; murder and rapine; all in the name of the slogans they shouted. "Freedom to India!" "Out with the foreigners!" "*Hindustan Zindabad!* " and "*Mahatma Gandhi Jai Jai!* "

The little Mahatma deplored these happenings and urged his countrymen against violence.' He begged them to follow only peaceful methods. But forces of evil had been unleashed and blood flowed throughout India.

In this chaos, the British, outnumbered by more than 350 to 1, lived their lives amidst daily emotions of resentment, hatred, fear and uncertainty. Some of them had lived in the country for a great many years. It had been a different India; a land of peaceful obedience and submission. Met by this tornado of rebellion, they did not know what to do.

A few resigned themselves to the inevitable and accepted the situation. They agreed that every nation had a right to govern its own soil.

A third community also figured in this picture of opposing and conflicting emotions. Insignificant in numbers compared to the Indian population, they exceeded the British throughout the land.

They were the Anglo-Indians, descendants of the early English settlers. A few of these families of pioneers had contrived to marry each other. Their offspring remained white, in colour. The majority had either intermarried with, or kept Indian women, resulting in progeny who were dark in skin. They were the Eurasians. But along with the fewer families who had more or less maintained pure English descent, all were classed as Anglo-Indians.

These people stoutly acclaimed their British descent. They adhered to the English language and way of living and were loyal to the King Emperor and the England from which their fathers had come.

Long before the days of Mahatma Gandhi, and since the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857, the British Government had realised that the land was a powder-keg, apt to explode at any moment. And so they reserved the key services in the country for the Anglo-Indians both white and swarthy, because the Government knew they could be trusted to remain loyal to Britain should the Indians revolt. But socially the average Englishman ostracised the Anglo-Indians, even the white ones. They were not to be fraternised with. It was permissible to speak to a man at work. Certainly not to mix with him in public or recognize or wish him the time of day on the highway. Clubs were reserved for Britons alone. No Anglo-Indian

could easily be a member.

The Indians had come to hate the British and looked upon them as unscrupulous foreign devils who relentlessly exploited the land. They despised the Anglo-Indians in general as a community of fawning cringers and lackeys; bastards by birth; the offspring of adultery and fornication; traitors to their motherland.

This story is about some of these elements and the mixed emotions and conditions of those turbulent days. Over all hangs the shadow of a man-eating tigress. Impartial to politics, race and colour, every living man and woman was her prey and a prospective meal for her empty belly.

Chapter 1
The Seeds of Dissension

"Ruth darling", said the tall Englishman, addressing the woman who sprawled on a sofa before him, "It'll take a little while to accustom yourself to life on a plantation in India. But you'll get used to it in time".

"Please stop repeating that over and over, John", she exploded sharply, "you've told me the same thing a hundred times before and I'm sick of hearing it".

The first speaker, John Greystone, owner of the plantation known as Rob Roy Estate, stood before an open window gazing into the darkness of night. He held a glass of whisky and soda in one hand from which he sipped occasionally. He was about forty years of age, measuring close upon six feet in height and of muscular build. A deeply tanned skin stretched tightly over his face and squared jaw, and a pair of grey-green eyes matched the clean-shaven countenance beneath his centrally-parted, wavy black hair.

Greystone regarded his wife pensively for a while and then took a long drink. "If there is anything you particularly need to make you happy, dear, you'd better tell me and I'll try to get it", he said eventually.

"It's not that, John. You've given me everything to make me comfortable", his wife conceded. "It's the long hours I have to spend by myself while you are away; or perhaps I miss seeing the new faces I met constantly back home. Being all alone is getting me down".

Ruth Greystone was twenty-five years old. Her roundish face boasted a satiny white skin. Cherry-red lips, faintly parted, showed two even rows of perfect teeth. Above the lips, a slightly up tilted nose increased the challenge of her dark eyes, and penciled eyebrows were framed in a high forehead topped by raven black hair set in the pony-tail fashion. Her legs, outstretched on the sofa, promised rounded thighs and exposed a perfect pair of calves. Ruth wore a red evening-dress, cut provokingly low to reveal luscious curves that heaved and fell with her quick breathing. On the table by her side stood a tumbler of gin and bitters, while a long, slender,

ivory holder, tipped by a shouldering cigarette, reposed daintily between the first and second fingers of her right hand.

Carrying his drink, John sat on the sofa beside her. Caressingly he rested one hand on her thigh and stooped to kiss her cheek. Ruth did not respond, but raised herself on an elbow and swallowed the rest of the gin and bitters at a gulp.

John had recently married Ruth Cleveland when he had gone to England on holiday, and brought her back with him to Rob Roy estate. This had happened nearly six months ago. Since then, Ruth had tried to accustom herself to the screech of cicadae in the jungle by day and the cackling howl of jackals at night. Hordes of mosquitoes, speckled insect-eating lizards, a huge toad and a cobra chasing it behind the bathtub, had annoyed and frightened her in turn. Most of all, she pined for company and was becoming fretful.

Greystone loved his wife dearly. The few months they had been married had in no way whetted his desire for her. He bent to kiss her a second time and noticed the strong woman-smell that impinged itself, on his nostrils. He became very conscious, too, of the deep valley so close to him between the bulge of her bosoms, and his eyes swept downwards to those tempting mounds of soft flesh. He could just see the tip of one strawberry tinted nipple that peeped enticingly through the restraining cradle of her nylon brassiere. Breathing harder, he sought her lips and his kiss Lingered and became passionate with desire.

Ruth held him off with the palm of her hand, her dark eyes gazing into his without response.

"Could we not go for a holiday to Bombay or Calcutta?" she asked, "it would be so nice to be in a city again".

John stopped kissing her and straightened himself. The tautening expression of passion on his face faded away.

"Ruth dear, you know that's impossible", he replied, "there's a lot of work to be done on the estate before the monsoon breaks and we have barely three months. Once the rain starts, it will pour for days on end for another three months. After that, we'll go wherever you want".

"And when does the monsoon start?" she inquired.

"About the middle of June", he answered," that is provided

it's up to schedule".

"This is only March; it's a hell of a long time to wait", broke in Ruth fretfully.

"That's so, darling. But why don't you come along with me every day? There are many parts of the estate that you haven't yet seen, you know".

"Well, I might do that", she responded with no great enthusiasm.

Further conversation was interrupted by their servant, Chandra, who stepped into the room noiselessly.

"*Khana thayar hai, Huzoor* ", "Dinner is served, Sir", he announced. He was a tall, very dark, middle-aged Tamilian of lanky build, with rather prominent eyes.

With his arm around her, John led his wife to the dining-room. The sun had long set behind the hills that extend in a seemingly endless succession from north to south to form the Western Ghats, the barrier of mountains that run down the west coast of India. It is a land of high peaks, split by deep valleys clothed in forest; of lush, evergreen jungle watered by copious rains. Towering trees, their bases hidden in dense undergrowth, keep the earth always moist. Even at noon-day a twilight gloom pervades everything, throbbing to the incessant chirping of wood-crickets. Beneath the leaves and blades of grass voracious leeches curl concealed, awaiting the opportunity to attach themselves to a passing quarry and gorge with blood.

The soil is immensely fertile, and for this reason numbers of plantations lie scattered throughout the area, their crops the pepper-vine, cardamom and ginger, with coffee estates on the eastern slopes of the *ghats* where they are sheltered from the fury of the monsoon. The screech of the crickets is broken by the cries of forest birds; the chattering of parrots and the joyous whoop of grey langoor monkeys high in the trees; the sounds of the jungle blending with the pleasant ripple of crystal clear streams that purl and eddy over mossy boulders and pebbly stretches.

Velvety darkness enshrouded the landscape to the north, to the south and west. Only in the east did a twinkle of light denote a human habitation. That illumination came from a petromax lantern

on the verandah of the Greystones' bungalow.

John's father had built this place. On the walls hung many of his shikar trophies. Through an open doorway was the drawing-room, furnished in unexpected luxuriance, and then the dining-room.

While they were eating, John said, "I forgot to ask you, darling. Did you hear a tiger roaring last night? Or rather, early this morning. It was shortly after 2 o'clock. I happened to note the time!"

Ruth looked up at him. "No, I'm afraid I was sound asleep. Are there many tigers about?"

"Not as a rule", her husband answered, "one happens along occasionally. I hope it was not the damned man-eater that has already accounted for two way-farers and two of my coolies. The men told me today that they heard it from their huts last night. As a matter of fact, they didn't want to go to work this morning, saying they were certain it was the man-eater and he would kill one of them. Can't say I blame them for being afraid, poor devils".

Greystone lapsed into silence as he thought about the tiger. If it killed again, his coolies would refuse to work. Rob Roy was an extensive plantation of a mixed nature. Arabica coffee grew along the higher slopes of the hill on which the bungalow stood. Lower down, rubber, pepper, cardamom and ginger predominated, it was his home and every inch of it was precious to him in memory and in fact.

Dinner over, they returned to the drawing-room where Ruth went to the table on which the bottles were arranged and poured herself a double gin and bitters. This she carried to her accustomed place on the sofa.

Lying back, in a deep contralto voice she commenced to hum "Sleepy Lagoon", while Greystone idly scanned the pages of an old number of the " Onlooker".

Ruth stopped singing, and inclining her head in John's direction asked, "Give me a cigarette, please".

The planter strode across the room, opened a glass cabinet and brought from it a silver box containing the cigarettes. He offered her the box, selected a Players for himself, and lit both.

Ruth exhaled the smoke slowly through her nostrils and decided to revert to her favorite topic.

"If only there was something to do here John", she complained, "somewhere to go, someone to speak to, it wouldn't be so had. This dreadful loneliness terrifies me at times."

"I know darling. I realise the change is difficult to get used to", he agreed soothingly. "So different from England. But it has to be faced, hasn't it? A planter's life is a lonely one".

"You're telling me. I've certainly found that out to my cost", Ruth cut in bitterly. Then she added in an acid tone, "Not only a planter's life, but his wife into the bargain".

"Why don't you interest yourself in the estate and in household work, or try to find a hobby of some kind?" John was beginning to become impatient.

"I'm not impressed with glorified gardening", Ruth snapped tartly," and what hobby is there in this benighted spot?"

John said nothing while Ruth finished her drink and yawned drowsily, stretching her arms upward and back. The languorous movement exposed to full advantage her voluptuous figure. Despite the resentful thoughts that had begun to crowd his mind, his eyes brightened in an animal gleam as he saw the movement, while he sucked his breath in sharply.

"We'll go to bed if you're tired, darling", he invited.

Walking across to the sofa on which she lay. Greystone lifted her easily in his powerful arms. When he did so, one bosom brushed against his cheek. He turned and implanted a kiss on it. Thus, carrying his wife, John stopped at the table on which stood the large double-wick oil lamp that illuminated the room. Supporting her weight with one hand, he momentarily disengaged the other to lower the wick. Then, bending forward, he blew down the chimney sharply. The light went out, plunging the room in darkness.

Chapter 2
The Man-eater Strikes

"*Sahib* ! *Sahib* !" The repeated calls intruded on John's consciousness as his eyes opened slowly. It was daybreak. Ruth lay next to him on the double bed, her silk night-shirt widely gaping at the throat.

"*Sahib* ! *Sahib* !" Once again the voice was calling. John recognised it as that of his servant. The summons sounded urgent. It must be so; otherwise the man would never have dared to awaken him. Sitting up in bed, Greystone lowered his pyjamaed legs to the floor and groped for his slippers. Shoving his feet into them, he got up and walked to the bedroom door. This he opened slightly, to come face to face with Chandra.

"What's happened?" he queried in Hindustani.

"The bad tiger has eaten a coolie" was the reply.

John's body stiffened automatically. The man-eater had killed again!

"Who brought the news?" he asked.

"A Lambani, one of your coolies", Chandra replied. "It happened near Nandya Palam, at the camp of the woodcutters who are felling timber to replant with young rubber trees, as your honour knows".

"Tell the man to wait. I'll return with him", John instructed his servant hastily.

Nandya Palam was the name borne by a small stream that had its source on a mountain top to the west and trickled slowly downhill to the valley below, where it joined a larger rivulet, known as the Karadi Arr or 'River of Bears'. It was an isolated locality, lying to the extreme northwest corner of his land and hitherto covered by virgin forest. Jumlum trees grew prolifically along the banks of this stream, and with the monsoon, when the fruit fell to earth in thousands to carpet the ground in a purple mantle, many sloth-bears from the surrounding forests foregathered here. Hence the name by which the rivulet came to be known.

John strode to the bathroom and commenced a hasty toilet as Ruth awoke. He could hear her moving about in the bed-room and stuck his lathered face through the half-opened door to say, "That damned tiger has killed another coolie. This makes the third. I'll go and have a look, and if I can locate the poor man's body I'll sit over it tonight. The brute may return to finish what's left."

To his surprise, Ruth asked, "May I come along with you?"

Greystone was pleased and replied, "By all means, dear; hurry and get dressed".

It was not long before he and Ruth had completed a quick breakfast and were ready. John armed himself with his double-barreled .470 rifle and ten soft-nosed cartridges. With Ruth beside him in the jeep and the Lambani behind, the planter drove off along the tortuous track leading to the north. It was more a bridle-path than a road and was severely furrowed by wash-aways caused through rain water flowing in torrents down the hill-slopes during the monsoon.

The vehicle whined its way in first and second gears up the steeply curving path, throwing its occupants about like peas in a pod. Some ten minutes driving brought them to a spot at which John stopped the jeep. From here they would have to walk through the jungle to the little clearing in the forest where the coolies had been working. The encampment consisted of some half-dozen shacks, each constructed of two posts hewn from the cut trees, and roofed with a canopy of leaves

An excited throng of about a dozen men, with as many women and twice that number of children of all ages, awaited them. They were the woodcutters and their wives and families. From one of the huts arose a loud and monotonous wailing John knew it came from the relatives of the man who had been taken by the man-eater.

Many voices began to speak at the, same time. He waved them to silence and addressing the Lambani in Tamil, asked him to point out those who knew exactly what had happened. The Lambani indicated a coolie named Chinnappan who had been an eye-witness to the affair. This man stated that late the previous evening, he and another coolie named Nagaraj were returning to camp after their day's work. He had just lit a beedi and was puffing

at it when Nagaraj slopped and walked a few paces away to answer the call of nature, squatting down on his haunches for the purpose. Without any warning, Chinnappan heard a loud "whoof" and a large tiger sprang into view, apparently from nowhere. In two bounds, it had reached Nagaraj, who jumped to his feet. The tiger knocked him down, and grabbing him in its mouth by the shoulder, commenced dragging its victim into the bushes. Nagaraj had screamed for help, calling to Chinnappan to save him. But Chinnappan had been frozen to the spot with terror, unable to move or utter a sound. In a few seconds the tiger and Nagaraj were lost to view in the dense undergrowth, although Chinnappan could still hear him calling for help. Then followed the sound of a worrying growl and a final shriek from Nagaraj after which had come complete silence. This had served to galvanise Chinnappan into action and he had fled back to their encampment. The Lambani had offered to brave the danger of the trip to the bungalow early next morning to inform John after they had spent a sleepless night around a huge fire which they had fed throughout the dark hours for protection against the possible return of the tiger.

Greystone thought for a few moments as to what would be the best thing to do. It was extremely unlikely that the tiger had stopped to eat its victim anywhere in the vicinity due to the noise from the camp and the fire that had been made. Probably it had carried the body up hill, or perhaps down to the Karadi Arr. The first thing was to try to find what was left of the man and Greystone called for volunteers to assist him in following up the tiger. The Lambani said he knew something about tracking and would come. And so did Chinnappan for Nagaraj had been his friend.

All this time Ruth had not understood what was going on although the weeping and wailing had told its own story and considerably unnerved her. Briefly John explained the position and said he was going to find the dead body.

"Wait here till I return", he concluded, "and for God's sake don't leave the clearing or attempt to go back to the jeep".

Then he walked to the hut from whence the wailing came and spoke a few words of sympathy to the bereaved family. Finally, with the rifle in his hands, the planter walked warily towards the spot where the tragedy had occurred, Chinnappan leading the way

with the Lambani following. It was not long before they reached their destination. Chinnappan pointed out the direction in which the tiger had made off with Nagaraj. From this point the men changed places and the Lambani took the lead, with John next, closely covering him against a sudden attack.

The undergrowth was dense. A few leaves brushed aside, two of them hanging broken from their sterns, indicated the path the tiger had followed with his victim dangling in his mouth. Some fifty yards further they came upon a splash of blood on the green floor of the jungle. This was undoubtedly the spot at which the tiger had released its grip on Nagaraj's shoulder and then killed him when he had voiced that last piercing scream heard by Chinnappan. Blood had gushed freely from the two wounds, and tell-tale splashes, coagulated on the forest grasses and leaves, made following-up much easier.

They moved slowly and stealthily for there was no knowing whether the tiger might have doubled back on the trail and was even at that moment waiting for them in the dense greenery ahead. The blood smears led eastwards and downhill. This confirmed that the killer had made off with its victim in the direction of the Karadi Arr which John knew to be about three-quarters of a mile away. As they proceeded the grass became taller and reached to their shoulders. Then the trail crossed a small dry rivulet and abruptly ended. Hidden behind a wild-plum bush were the remains of Nagaraj.

The man-eater had eaten well during the night. All that was left of the poor man was his head, part of an arm, one leg from the thigh downwards, and a little distance away the remaining leg, still attached to a gnawed-through shin. The eyes were wide open and stared at them steadily with the fixed look of the dead. There was a strange placid expression on the face. The pelvis and rib bones of the corpse lay scattered about, grim evidence of the hearty meal the carnivore had made.

Greystone and the Lambani stood still and gazed intently into the jungle. Around them settled a vibrant silence. No leaf stirred, while they had the feeling of being watched all the time. John began searching for a convenient tree on which to tie his machan, for though it had eaten so much there was enough left to justify the

man-eater's return that night.

Ten yards away grew a jumlum sapling thirty feet in height. It was the closest tree but far from ideal in nature for the purpose in view, being almost bare of leaves at that time of the year.

John and the Lambani talked together in whispers and decided that a machan could be tied about twelve feet off the ground on that tree. This was not a safe height at which to sit for a man-eater, or any tiger for the matter of that, but there was no other choice left if he did not want to forego a chance of killing this beast. They would have to go back now for the required materials and more men to help them in the task.

Before leaving, the three men covered the cadaver with small branches so that vultures would not discover it and pick the corpse clean of flesh by noon. Then they retraced their steps quickly to the woodcutters' encampment.

John told his wife what they had found and instructed the coolies to cut and prepare lengths of wood, about six feet each, while he went back to the house for rope for tying the machan and his electric torch. Leaving the Lambani, they walked back to the jeep to drive swiftly homeward. By the time he returned to the clearing, the coolies had done as he had said. Asking the Lambani, Chinnappan and three more men to accompany him to carry the wood and help in tying the machan, John led the party back to the place where they had found the remains of Nagaraj.

As silently as possible the stouter pieces were lashed to convenient branches of the jumlum tree and the other bits placed crisscross, to form the platform. Smaller branches with leaves were then cut and put across the sticks, more leaves being skillfully entwined much as possible. The job took well over an hour and a half, but John was fairly satisfied in the end with the result. The hide-out was well screened, and its occupant would not be visible to the tiger.

It was 4 o'clock by the time he got into the machan after removing the branches with which he had earlier covered Nagaraj's mutilated corpse. John settled himself comfortably, placing the thermos flask and biscuits he had brought in one corner and his great coat and cap in another. Then he inserted three new cells into the torch and tested the bulb before clamping it to his rifle barrel.

John also tried the opening made in the leaves facing the kill and found he could point his weapon through in the direction of the human cadaver without difficulty.

When all was ready, he told the coolies to return to their huts after giving them final instructions, "Don't make any noise tonight, and only light fires sufficient for your protection".

As the last man passed out of sight in the thick foliage, John found himself alone with his thoughts and the jungle. He began to ponder about the man-eater and the five deaths it had caused. He wondered if it would return, and when. This made him look downwards at the remains of what yesterday had been a vigorous human being, one of his own coolies. From where he sat, it appeared as if the glaring eyes in the severed head stared at him in reproach. Perhaps those had been Nagaraj's last thoughts as he died in this terrible manner. After all, the woodcutter had taken service under him on the estate. Was he responsible for the poor man's death?

These depressing recriminations began to force themselves more and more upon John's consciousness till he threw them off with an effort. Life was but a gamble and death inevitable, whether it came under the jaws of a tiger or on a sick-bed at home. He determined to pay a fair amount in compensation to the dead man's family. But would money compensate for the breadwinner who was gone?

Thinking of families, he began to think of his own. There was his aged mother living at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight. He had no brothers or sisters, which perhaps was fortunate.

And of course, there was Ruth. He remembered how he had first made her acquaintance those few months ago when he had gone on leave to England. It seemed only the other day. He had been invited over by some friends of his mother. The event was an informal party. Ruth Cleveland had been introduced to him earlier in the evening, and when the dancing had begun no doubt expected him to ask her to partner him. He had fore-stalled such an idea by telling her that he had spent so many years in the wilds of India that he had long ago forgotten what little he knew about dancing. Ruth had countered, with that lively smile of hers,

"Well, I'll teach you".

Then they had danced, and as he found himself with his arms around her, John remembered only too vividly how he had thrilled to the first proximity of her body pressed so tightly against him. After that day, they appeared to have fallen in love with each other. His mother had wept with mingled joy and sadness at the simple wedding when her only son now belonged to another woman.

Then had come the voyage out to India. John remembered the excitement and the thrill of joy he had felt on every occasion Ruth had expressed pleasure at some new sight in the Orient. Next followed the beginning of their life on the plantation and the realization that was breaking upon him that his wife was not at all happy now.

Gradual awakening to this fact had become evident with the abatement of the voluptuous abandon with which she had at first surrendered herself in their intimate moments, accompanied by Ruth's oft-expressed desires for a trip to one or other of the cities of India in search of social life. Lastly, John viewed with deep concern the fact that she was beginning to drink heavily.

Suddenly he was aroused from his reverie by the strident call of a grey jungle cock in a thicket close by. He looked at his wrist watch and was surprised that time had passed so rapidly. It was now half-past five.

The challenge of the jungle fowl to the departing day was rapidly answered by a dozen of his kind from all quarters of the forest as they crowed back and forth to each other. These were the usual cries of the male birds as they showed off their speckled plumage to the hens or challenged each other for a mate: "Whee-e-e-ew! Kuck-kaya-kya-kuck'm!" they crowed lustily.

No sooner had the jungle fowl commenced calling than the little brown spur-fowl started to join in. Their notes intermingled with the cries of the former; far less pleasant but nevertheless filled with the joy of living and the call to mate. He began to think how the sex-urge was the driving factor in all living things —jungle-fowl, spur-fowl, and men and women, too!

Six o'clock came. The brightness of daylight began to fade into the mellowing hues of sunset and the sky in the west turned from crimson, and orange, and purple to blood-red. The plaintive cries of roosting peacocks arose in many directions, while one large

bird, his wings flapping heavily, sailed over the tree on which John sat, his majestic tail trailing in splendour behind him like a living comet of green and blue and gold.

The shadows deepened yet and the cries of the jungle-fowl were gradually hushed. The chirping and twittering of the birds of the day had long since died away. Those of the night now took up the refrain. A nightjar called nearby, "Chuck-chuck-chuck-chuckchuckoo-oo-oo!", and very soon the jungle seemed alive with them. They glided past to settle like motionless brown stones upon the earth.

It was almost dark. The night-jars were still making their peculiar cries, while sharp, squeaking noises emanated from half-a-dozen large bats that circled the tree-top in all directions, grabbing in their flight the nocturnal insects that were just awakening.

Then it is night. An eerie, discordant scream rends the silence, rising in crescendo and echoing across the jungle aisles: "Oooo-ooo-oooh! Oo-where? Oo-where?" “Here! Here! Hee-yah! Heeee-yah!" It is the cry of the jackal pack. Objects in the vicinity fade from sight except the higher branches of the neighbouring trees, out-lined in black silhouette against the lighter hue of the star-studded sky. The elfin lamps of flitting fireflies spangle the ghostly gloom.

John looked at his wrist-watch again. The figures, in radium, were quite distinct. The time was seven-fifteen and the long night-vigil before him had commenced. For some time silence reigns. The darkness, stygian at first, gives way to a faint glow caused by the

reflection of the myriad stars that twinkle and coruscate in the heavens above. Time pauses, and another faint glow at the eastern horizon heralds the rising moon. Her orb peeps above the tops of the serrated line of forest trees, a glowing, blood-red ball of fire, soon to become a sphere of phosphorescent, scintillating splendour as she mounts higher and yet higher.

John remembered it was the time of the full-moon, it would be a great help if the tiger decides to put in his appearance. It is nine o'clock now, yet no indication from the larger denizens of the forest has heralded the movements of a passing carnivore.

Soft rays of refulgent moonlight filter through the gaps

among the trees and bathe the cadaver on the ground in its silvery sheen. As he stares at it he can faintly distinguish the severed head and the other remains as dark blotches on the earth. Time continues to drag slowly by.

Then, far away on the hill-side, a jungle-sheep suddenly emits his hoarse bark, a series of staccato notes: "Kharr! Kharr!" Something has alarmed the little deer. John tingles with excitement as he imagines the slinking form of the man-eater creeping ever nearer. But the calls of the khakkar become less frequent, and after an interval, cease.

Silence reigns over the jungle once again; but not for long. "Aiow! Aiow! Aiow!" Those are the sharp cries of a herd of spotted deer, much closer to where he is sitting than the khakkar had been. The alarm confirms to the anxious listener that the band has seen or scented one of the killers of the jungle. Their cries hold the very timbre of stark terror. The spotted deer are still calling when a sambar voices his ringing bellow a hundred yards away. "Whoonk!" he calls loudly, repeating "Whoonk! Whoonk!"

John knew it is a stag by the deep-throated note. The sambar runs up the hill, still uttering his booming call. Down in the valley, in the direction of the Karadi Arr, comes the answering bellow of a doe, higher pitched and more hysterical. She has heard the alarm raised by the lordly stag. The warnings are all too clear. They announce the coming of the man-eater.

That is when the tiger roars: "Aaungh-aaa! Aaunghaaa!”

He should appear very soon now. Greystone sat bolt upright, the rifle in his lap pointing through the opening in the foliage concealing the machan. His whole being trembled with excitement.

But no tiger comes. The calls of the sambar die away and the only noise that breaks the silence is the chirping of a wood-cricket as it shrills vigorously at the foot of the tree. A dark shape flits overhead, silently and wraith-like. There is the sound of flapping wings as it settles itself on the top of a neighbouring bough.

"Whoo-ooo! Whoo-ooo! Whoo-ooo!" A weird cry, that would chill a new-comer to the forest, shatters the silence. John hardly notices the presence of the great horned-owl that has perched itself so nearby. He was too intent upon awaiting the arrival of the

dreaded man-eater.

Yet the tiger did not appear. He stared at the remains of the dark form that had been a man, till his eyes burned. His watch indicated ten minutes after ten o'clock. The man-eater ought to have returned by now. John began to feel it would not show up.

Pondering this thought dismally, his eyes searched the underbrush where the bright moonlight succeeded in penetrating to trace patterns of chequered light and dark shadows upon the jungle floor. As he stared, Greystone noticed what appeared to be a boulder or log beneath a bush next to the remains of his coolie. For a moment, he overlooked it and his eyes continued to rove in all directions. Then suddenly the significance of what he had just seen struck him. Nagaraj's body was lying under a bush, but when he had looked at it in daylight, there had been nothing nearby.

What he saw now was the tiger, and he had almost failed to identify it in the confusing rays of speckled moonlight! John looked again. This time he clearly made out the man-eater hunched on its belly alongside its human victim of the previous evening. Sweat poured from his forehead and trickled down his face. In a peculiarly distracted manner, John noticed that the salt from the sweat burned his eyes.

A crunching sound came to him and the rending of flesh, followed by the snap of bone. The man-eater had commenced its grisly meal. Slowly John raised the rifle to his shoulder and tried to align the sights. But the machan was in deep shadow and despite of moonlight, the fore-sight could not be seen. He would have to use his torch.

His right hand was on the trigger as his left groped for the switch-button. He felt it under the ball of his thumb, took a deep breath to steady himself, and pressed the knob.

The right beam shone forth before John realised he had made an unpardonable mistake. In his excitement, he had not brought the face of the torch outside the opening in the leaves framing the gap through which rifle was protruding, and the light become reflected by a couple of the leafy twigs instead of falling on the tiger, making it quite impossible for him to see beyond them.

Realising his error, Greystone quickly pushed the weapon

forward till the torch cleared the obstructing twigs.

But it was too late. Those initial seconds, and that bright light, had been sufficient to warn the man-eater of the danger above. With a snarling roar, it leaped back into the concealment of the jungle, where John heard it land with a soft thud. Thereafter, the tiger made no noise. There was nothing to indicate whether it was still lurking in the underbrush or had gone silently away.

For the rest of the night he sat perched uncomfortably in the machan. After 3 a.m. a bitterly cold breeze blew down from the mountains, chilling him to the marrow. This sudden drop in temperature was conducive to a heavy dew-fall. John heard the moisture dripping from the leaves as it saturated his clothing.

His great coat could not protect him from the penetrating cold even if it kept out the dew. The barrels of the rifle felt like ice. Wafted upwards by the breeze, the stench from Nagaraj's decomposing corpse increased with each hour, making John feel sick.

At long last, the cheery crow of a jungle-cock heralded the close of what had been a disappointing night. The sun rose in shades of vermillion, yellow, indigo and pink, dissipating the spirals of mist that swirled above the soaked forest.

Then he heard the voices of the coolies calling to him from a considerable distance. John shouted back to them to approach, and when they were below the tree, dropped down his blanket and coat before descending himself. To the anxious party around him, and the queries of what had happened, he could only tell the truth. The man-eater had been clever and had outwitted him.

The daily menace in which they all lived was to continue.

Chapter 3
Robert Nicholson Pays a Visit

“We have company, John. Isn't that Robert's car?”

Sunlight shimmered on the windshield of the Buick that had turned into the drive leading to the old-fashioned portico of John Greystone's bungalow. Ruth had noticed it first.

Her husband looked up at the remark. "You're right" he replied, "It's been a long time since he called. Today, being Sunday, has prompted the visit, no doubt".

Robert Nicholson was the District Superintendent of Police. His headquarters were at Nilambur, 45 miles away. Occasionally he called on them and had proved a pleasant companion, although these visits; were few and far between as his district covered a wide area.

The car came to a halt and Robert stepped out from behind the wheel. He was a rotund man, about five feet eight inches in height, with florid complexion, waxed moustache and piercing brown eyes. He was dressed in khaki shorts and shirt, and removed his solar topee to reveal a closely-cropped shock of brown hair that was turning to grey.

Only then did John and Ruth notice he had a companion who appeared to be hardly over 30 years of age and contrasted with Robert in being much taller and of muscular, but rather thin build. He was also dressed in police uniform that befitted his clean-shaver face and pointed jaw very well. Blue eyes twinkled beneath neatly brushed, flaxen hair, as this stranger also removed his helmet.

"Glad to see you after quite a long while, Robert", Greystone greeted affably.

"Good morning, Ruth. How are you, John?" Nicholson returned, "I came to tell you that at last I've received orders sanctioning my long-leave pending retirement, and to introduce Teddy Baker, who is to replace me".

"So glad you've come, Robert, and you too, Mr. Baker", remarked Ruth as they shook hands before climbing the steps to the verandah, "I'm bored stiff this loneliness and it's a real treat to see a

new face". As she uttered the words, Ruth glanced side-ways at the new police officer.

They seated themselves in the Singapore cane chairs that stood on the verandah and John called aloud, “Chandra, please bring the whisky and soda".

His dusky retainer came back with a bottle of John Hague and four tumblers on a tray, returning to bring a soda from a kerosene-operated refrigerator in the entry.

“Well, I can't say I'm sorry I'm going". Robert Nicholson was speaking, "although I will miss you both very much indeed".

John poured a liberal helping of whisky into their glasses and added the soda.

“Cheers", he said, after he had filled his own glass, and the four of them raised their tumblers.

Robert Nicholson proved to be as garrulous this day he was usually taciturn. "How is Rob Roy getting along? Any coolie trouble” he inquired.

“No, I can't complain", replied Greystone, "the men are fairly regular nor do they appear to have any grouse the moment, though that confounded man-eating tiger has shown up again, blast him".

‘Yes, my Daffedar sent in a report only yesterday, mentioning that one of your chaps had been killed and ten. Did it happen on the estate?”

"It did, and the beast appears to be exceptionally crafty. I sat up for it, but it didn't give me the chance of a shot. A leaf fouled my torch-beam".

Ted Baker had hardly spoken all this while but was sipping his drink and glancing at Ruth now and again. John's narration about the tiger aroused his interest, and he leaned forward to ask, "Is there really a man-eater here, Mr. Greystone?"

Before John could reply, Ruth chimed in, "Oh, don't be so formal. He's John, and I'm Ruth; and you are —Ted", she added, archly.

Baker accepted the compliment. "Thank you, Mrs. Greystone —I mean, Ruth", he corrected himself. Turning to his host, he went on, "Do tell me all about it. I'm fascinated, having read so much

about man-eaters while never coming anywhere close to a tiger—except in a zoo".

Robert guffawed and said jocularly, "Of course you haven't"; adding, "as you must have gathered, Ted's just out from home. He's one of those lucky blighters who sat for an examination, passed out and became a D.S.P. straight away. He didn't have to work his way up the ladder, as I did".

John smiled. He had often enough heard Robert say the same thing, and it seemed a pet subject for him to narrate that he had risen from the ranks. Nor had he concealed the contempt he had for Commissioned Officers sent out from England to the service with no practical experience behind them. Briefly he explained about the man-eater, ending with his fear that the coolies would become demoralised.

"I'd be scared to death myself", admitted Ted, "the very mention of the word man-eater sends creepy shivers down my spine".

"What a pity you failed to shoot the beast", he continued, "that would have ended all your troubles. Besides, it must be awfully disheartening for something like that to happen at the last moment. I do envy you chaps, living in a land where you can experience such thrills, rather than the monotonous existence and everlasting rain back home".

"Don't speak too soon, my lad", chuckled Robert “I'll wager the time will come when you'll long for dear old England in spite of its monotony and cold. Tiger shooting may be very exciting, but there are things in this damned country now-a-days that make me look forward to the day of my sailing. You must thank your lucky stars that you're replacing me in a fairly quiet area. Robberies are comparatively few, an enraged husband may chop up his wife here and there through jealousy, or poison her boy-friend. Dacoities down south are unheard of. But the poor oafs in the police up north are having a hell of a time. Some damned little half naked hermit named Gandhi has set the country aflame, and we hear of riots nearly every day in the big cities. I don't understand why the Government doesn't shoot the blighter and be done with it".

His tone was peeved, for Robert had spent many years in India and deeply resented these insurrections by the natives against the British Raj, which he felt should assert its power. He sipped his drink, scowling morosely at his boots.

"Mahatma Gandhi—you mean that nationalist leader chappie? We were told in England that we might expect trouble from him and his followers. Still, I seem to have a sneaking admiration for the plucky devil. From what I've heard, he's been in and out of jail like nobody's business, and still continues to defy us". Ted spoke the words with a definite tinge of esteem in his voice.

This caused an explosion from the older police officer, who leaned forward in his chair and said, "The Government consists of a lot of half-wits. They don't realise that they are harbouring a very dangerous man who is uniting the millions of India and will yet cause a revolution".

"Oh, do let's stop talking politics. This frightful Gandhi person; he's a beggar of some kind, isn't he, John?" Ruth asked the question testily.

"By no means a beggar, my dear", her husband explained, "but a very influential and clever man. His legal background stands him in good stead, and he's an expert on mob psychology. Robert is certainly right when he says that Gandhi has captured the imagination of millions of his countrymen, and I agree he's a most dangerous man".

Then, turning to them, he continued, "Care for another drink?"

Robert nodded his head absent-mindedly, while Ted said, "Thanks".

John poured another round of whisky and soda into each of their tumblers.

"You must come over often, Ted", invited Ruth. "It's so dull here. Since you're new to India, you'll need someone to show you the ropes".

"Ha, ha, that's a good one", chuckled Robert, "look who's talking! You haven't been out here so very long yourself, Ruth".

"Well, just a few months, but I feel like a veteran. I sometimes think I'm Jungle Jim himself after living in these wilds".

John managed to suppress a cynical smile as he listened to his wife's words and remembered how little she had interested herself in the estate, and particularly the jungle.

The conversation rambled on for another ten minutes before Robert Nicholson climbed to his feet and stretched slightly. "Come along lad, we must be going. I'll drive you around to a couple more of our *chowkies* (out-posts)".

Turning to the Greystones, he said, "I'll call again to say goodbye".

The four of them walked down the verandah steps to the waiting car, where the two policemen clambered aboard with a final farewell. A few seconds later the car was whining up the gradient that led away from Rob Roy estate, and Ruth and John retraced their steps to their former seats.

"What a delightful boy", she said reminiscently, "he looks so fresh and pink. That's the advantage of an English climate. This sultry weather will soon wear all that away, as it has already done with me".

"Well, the Indian climate has its advantages", stated John, "I prefer it, any day, to the everlasting cold and rain of Europe".

"You would", broke in Ruth sharply, "you've been here so long that you are half-native yourself. You're quite at home with your coolies and don't think that I want some company".

"Nothing like keeping good relations with your workers, my dear" laughed John, "it's claimed that more work can be had from contented labourers than when a planter behaved like a slave-driver. At least I've had no trouble so far".

"Labour, coolies, the estate, cutting and planting. That's all I hear you talk about, night and day. I do wish you would try to speak about something more interesting".

"Really darling, I'm sorry you feel that way about it, but you must remember I'm a planter", Greystone corrected, "and

to a planter his estate is all that matters".

"I suppose it is, but I'm getting a bit sick of it". She walked out of the room without another glance at him, and as her shapely figure passed from view, John could not help wondering how long they could go on like this. He got up from his chair, walked down the steps and into the garden where, with hands clasped behind his back, he gazed meditatively at the bright blue sky above, across which a few fleecy clouds were scudding.

They had still a long while to wait for the monsoon.

Chapter 4
The Stranger Urges Rebellion

"Brothers! Gather together and hearken! I've a vital matter to talk to you about".

The stranger called in a loud voice. His curious invitation was something unusual in the hum-drum existence of the workers on Rob Roy estate. Moreover, he had appeared suddenly in their midst as if from nowhere. Soon every man stood before him, with the women and children who hastened from their homes to find out what it was all about.

The speaker, Raman Nair, was a short man perhaps in his early forties with streaks of grey showing through neatly parted, thick black hair. He hailed from Cochin and was a Malayali by sect. He also was the local leader of the Congress party in the area. At least, that was what he claimed to be. But the Police records indicated he was a Communist.

Raman Nair hated all white people; and heading that list were the British. The large brass horn had been blown by the coolie maistry that evening to signify work on the plantation was over for the day. It was 5 o'clock when, in groups and singly, the coolies began to return to their quarters.

Raman Nair awaited them, standing on the earthen platform that had been built around the base of the sacred peepul tree behind their little huts.

When a fairly large audience had assembled, he started, "It grieves my heart to see you toil from the early hours till late in the evening in order to enrich the white man who employs you. Like you, I'm an Indian. You are my own flesh and blood. To see you slave thus, ground down in the dust, makes me very sad. Observe your women. Look at your poor children. I see that some of them are wearing old and torn sarees. Your children are in rags. You're also in rags. For houses you live in tiny hovels. Your bellies are empty because you are too poor to buy food for yourselves and your families. Your employer—the accursed Britisher—pays you but a few annas each day for extracting your toil and sweat, your very life-blood. You shiver in the cold at night. When it rains, you still

have to work and get wet with no dry clothes to change into. Should you be ill or absent for a day or even a few hours, he cuts your wages although they are already miserably low. This evil, and more he does to you, while he lives with his ill-begotten wife on the fat of the land, in a fine palatial bungalow. He drives a motor-car, stuffs himself with food and drink, and earns thousands of rupees at your expense all for himself, while you starve.

"It's not right that such injustice should continue my brothers, my sisters, my children. This great land of ours—India—is struggling to be free from the chains of bondage, from the evil foreign yoke, the slavery that was forced upon us through trickery by the British. It's our duty, yours and mine, to act bravely now and help set India free."

"The struggle is going on all over our land. Thousands of our innocent countrymen, women and children, are being butchered each day in cold blood by the cruel English soldiers. But the dawn of our victory is at hand when we will drive this white man and his wife and all the damned white people in India into the sea."

"To hasten that day, we must learn to fight. We cannot do that openly, for we have no weapons. The white man is too cunning to allow that, for he knows we would then kill him where he stood. So we must be equally cunning. We must beat him at his own game. We must oppose him in every way. We must obstruct him at every turn. As you know, a planter is helpless without coolies, for he cannot work his estate or harvest his crops. To make him feel the power that lies within you, all you have to do is not go to work. Demand higher wages. He will threaten you and try to frighten you with fines and dismissal. If you all stand united, he is helpless. He dare not dismiss you; because if he does so, he will ruin his own estate and impoverish himself. He has no alternative but to give in to your demands. When he has done that, after a short time we will make yet more demands and force him to agree to those also. Finally, by doing this sort of thing all over India; by disrupting communications; by wrecking trains; by harassing them at all places and in every way; by killing them at every opportunity; we will so torment these Britishers that I promise you a time will come when they will be only too glad to flee from the shores of our beloved country and return to their own".

Raman Nair ended his speech and gazed around to see what effect it had produced. His eloquence had excited him and he closed his diatribe in a tone of frenzy that made the sweat run down his face in tiny streams.

The result of his harangue was disappointing, at least as far as the majority were concerned. They were quiet, simple people, accustomed to peaceful ways, and such strong talk was beyond their comprehension. Most of them remained silent or gazed at him blankly. A few here and there murmured sounds of agreement or disapproval.

He was about to continue when the voice of a lanky individual standing at the back of the gathering called, "All this is very well, but when we stop working and the *dorai* stops paying us, who will feed our families?"

It was the sort of question Raman Nair had heard before and did not like hearing again. Really he could not answer it, for there was no suitable rejoinder.

To his good luck, somebody else who shared his views was bold enough to voice his opinion. He came out with a fresh point which Raman Nair was not slow to exploit.

"Much of what you say is a fact, O stranger. And then another misfortune has befallen us. An evil man-eating tiger has come to this place and a few weeks ago, killed my own cousin-brother (first cousin), named Nagaraj. It's true the white *dorai* attempted to shoot it. But he failed and the tiger is still in our midst. Any day, at any time, one of us may become another victim".

"Hear that, O my listeners! Hearken to the words of your own brother!" broke in Raman Nair, rising to the occasion. "He has spoken very wisely indeed. What does the white man care if you are eaten by this tiger? What does he care if all of you die, one by one? As long as he is snug and safe in his big bungalow, eating well, enjoying the good things of life and making a lot of money at the expense of your toil and your lives, he cares nothing. He's hard, and cruel, and selfish; just the same as all the English. For this reason we must drive them out. If you will give me shelter and permit me to stay in your settlement for a few days, I will organise a plan by which we can worry this white pig who is so heartless".

This time a hum of assent rippled through the gathering. Assuredly there would be no harm in offering this gallant stranger their hospitality.

And so Raman Nair became the guest of the coolie-lines

Chapter 5
Ted Baker Accepts an Invitation

A week later Ruth sat fretfully in a cane chair on the verandah, trying to concentrate on a magazine. It was 10 a.m. and John had gone in the jeep on his daily inspection of the estate. She gazed outside and blinked her eyes against the glare. Presently she heard the hum of an approaching car. For a moment, she thought it was her husband returning from work. Then she remembered that he would not be back before noon for lunch. Shortly later the car came into view and she recognised Robert's Buick. Ruth did not like Nicholson. He had always been polite, yet she realised he knew she did not quite fit into the picture of things correctly. “What could the old fool want”, she thought.

As the car came closer she discovered that the driver was Ted Baker. And what was more, he was alone. The automobile came to a standstill under the porch and Ruth went down the steps to welcome her visitor.

"Good morning, Ruth", greeted the police officer, "I do hope I'm not intruding on your time, but as I was passing I thought of dropping in for a few minutes".

"Of course, Ted; you're welcome. I'm so glad you came. Do come in and have tea", she invited. "I see you're beginning to feel the effects of tropical India". Ruth smiled teasingly as the new Superintendent sank into the cane chair she had vacated and wiped his sweating forehead.

"Bearer", she called, and to the servant who noiselessly presented himself, "please bring some tea and biscuits".

Chandra bowed and disappeared as silently as he had come.

"Why perch on that uncomfortable chair? Come, sit on this sofa. It's far more cosy", Ruth continued.

Ted rose and followed her to the settee a few feet away, where he sat down beside her.

"How do you like your job and India in general? Or should I not talk shop so soon?" she asked.

"Well, as things go, I like both. Life here is a great change. How about you?"

"Hmm", she replied, "I detest the country, its climate and the people. They get on my nerves. The servants particularly, appearing as if from nowhere".

As she uttered these words Ruth started visibly, for there beside her stood the bearer holding a tray with the biscuits and tea she had ordered. The sombre dark eyes of the Indian looked down upon her, and in that glance Ted thought he detected contempt and dislike. The man must have overheard her.

"Set the tray down on the table over here please", Ruth spoke sharply.

Chandra obeyed and left the room as silently as he had twice entered it, his bare feet making no noise on the stone floor. She busied herself mixing two cups of tea and offered the biscuits, to Ted.

"Thanks" he murmured, helping himself to one.

"Excuse my fingers" she interjected as she placed another biscuit on the side of his saucer.

"Why worry, it'll taste all the nicer". Ted uttered the words merely as a gesture to meet the occasion but caught the coy glance she gave him in answer to his remark.

They sipped their tea awhile quietly. Finally, Baker broke the silence.

"I'm sorry you have that opinion about India. I think it's a nice country. It's beautiful. And the people are interesting. I confess I feel the heat a lot. What would we not give back home for this sunshine, although over here I do admit it's a bit oppressive!"

"Well, at least you go about, but I'm stuck in this damned bungalow all day while John is out. It's awfully monotonous".

"I suppose it is", he commented, "but you'll get accustomed to it in time".

"Now you're talking like John. I've been worrying him to take me to Calcutta or Bombay, but he's wedded to his plantation and says he cannot leave till after the monsoons are over. God alone knows how I'm going to stick it till then". She sounded cross.

They had drained their cups by this time and Ruth refilled them.

"I wish you would call over more frequently. I cannot tell you how nice it is to have someone to chat to". The words were spoken huskily and Ruth gazed into the young man's eyes. He found he could not meet that look, and his own eyes dropped to the floor as he felt himself reddening. She moved a trifle closer and her left knee brushed lightly against his thigh. They chatted noncommittally about one thing and another. The clock struck ten. It would take another hour before John would be back. Ruth allowed her hand to rest on his fore-arm as she bent forward and asked,

"Please get me a cigarette, and take one yourself, Ted. The box is in the showcase over there. I feel too lazy to get up".

"Certainly", he responded, and arose to oblige her.

Ruth leaned towards him when he stooped to light her cigarette and the neck of her dress fell forward. His eyes travelled down the deep cleft clearly revealed and stayed there longingly. Ruth knew that he had seen. Her lower lip began to tremble a little.

The sound of a car broke in on them at that moment. Baker straightened himself as Ruth said testily,

"That's John; he's much earlier than usual today".

He changed his seat to one of the cane chairs, and a few seconds later Greystone brought the jeep to a halt behind his car.

"Hello, Ted", he greeted; and then, noticing his visitor was unaccompanied asked, "didn't you bring Robert along?"

"No, he's busy at headquarters writing his final reports. As a matter of fact, he asked me to tell you he expected to sail for home in a fortnight and said he would drop in to wish you and Ruth in a day or two".

"Care for a drink?" Greystone queried.

"No thanks", Ted answered, "I've been drinking tea with Ruth while comparing our impressions on India".

For a moment, there was silence. John seemed preoccupied. Then he said, "A Congress blighter came to my coolie lines last evening and has been setting my men up against me. I noticed a marked change in them this morning and wondered why they were

so sullen till my maistry told me all about it. I expect you Police-wallahs must be experiencing this sort of thing, too. What are you going to do about it?" John asked the question with a note of anxiety. He knew only too well what labour trouble meant and where it would lead.

"Robert has been telling me quite a lot and giving me tips on how to deal with the situation. Personally, I don't see what there is to be so perturbed about. In any case, labour disputes are cropping up all over the world now-a-days. So, what's there to be unduly worried over if they occur in India, it’s inevitable." Ted's assertion sounded quite matter of fact.

Greystone sat up abruptly in his chair. He was aghast and showed it. No wonder the Empire was crumbling and the British losing control if this was the sort of officer sent out from England in these critical times to maintain order in a country where conditions were growing rapidly worse each day.

He leaned forward and began to speak earnestly. "I don't know what Robert told you, but I would like to offer a word of advice. You are young and just out from England. You don't understand the East, or the eastern way of thinking. I can assure you it's very different from Western ways and ideas. I should know; for I was born and bred here. What you don't realise is that all this is only part of a much bigger move to kick us out of India. Apart from Gandhi's congressmen, there's a large Communist element being instigated by the Bolshies. As it stands, the life of a white man in some of the more remote parts of the country is now in a state of perpetual danger. No doubt you get your Police reports. You can see for yourself conditions are getting pretty rotten up north. The Government has to do something about it and do it quickly, or the country will be in an uproar".

"That's more or less what Robert told me, but after all what is it that we can do?" asked Ted. "How long do you expect a small country like England to hold the millions of India under control? I think we should give them whatever it is they are asking for and be done with it".

The planter was about to retort when Ruth burst out "There we go again. Now it's this Mahatma Gandhi character and his Congress followers. Let's talk of something else".

"I'm sorry dear, but I wanted to tell Ted about this trouble-maker who came to the coolie-lines".

"How about the tiger?" Baker interjected changing the subject, "any news of the blighter? I should like to have a smack at him".

"No, he appears to have vanished, and I do hope his departure is permanent. The Congress wallah by himself is bad enough, without further killings by the man-eater. That would bring about a crisis. Labour is bloody hard to get nowadays without all these factors to drive it away".

"You have a problem there", admitted Ted. Then, rising to his feet, he went on, "Well, I must be going as I have to return to the office to sign some papers. Robert is bent upon putting me into harness as early as possible".

"Won't you stay for a bite of lunch?" Ruth invited, "it would be a pleasure".

"Yes, please do", John echoed.

"Thanks very much, I shall be delighted some other time. Just now, I really must get back".

The Greystones accompanied him to the Buick and watched till the vehicle disappeared down the drive. Then they went inside to lunch.

Chapter 6
Robert's Parting Advice

"There, my boy, that's all there's to it. The men under you are good fellows and can be relied upon in an emergency".

The speaker was Robert Nicholson, and the time, a day before his departure to England. He had shown Ted Baker all his duties. He had conducted him around the area of his administration, and now felt certain that his young protégé would do a fairly good job after taking over where he had left off.

"Thank you, sir. You've been more than kind in explaining all these things to me and I'll try to do my best", replied Ted. "I do hope I'll become a worthy successor to you".

The elder man smiled wryly. His companion's flattery pleased him not a little, but his smile was occasioned by the conscious knowledge of how much really remained to be done despite his indefatigable efforts in the years that had passed.

"And of course, there are the reams of paper work", he continued. "Always try to keep abreast of them and never allow them to fall into arrears. For once that happens it's most difficult to catch up again. Not that I consider the half of it necessary", he mused, "The I.G.P. at Madras seems to forget we are policemen with heaps of executive work to do. Instead, he buries us beneath avalanches of memos, often calling for detailed reports on trivial matters. At times, I wrote letters all day as if I was a member of some correspondence club. Matters have become much worse latterly, ever since the coming of this damned with little or no work to do. But those good old days have gone. If I had my way, I would've eliminated this Gandhi pest years ago. But, as usual, the British are slack and lenient—far too soft. Now the struggle has come, and by God it has come to stay. What's worse, it's growing; and I don't know how or where it'll end".

Ted Baker listened patiently to his compatriot. In the few weeks he had been with him he had come to like Robbie immensely, although he recognised that the elder man had distinctively imperialistic ideas. Ted excused him for this, remembering that he came from the old school of colonists who had

spent so many years in the country that they seemed incapable of adapting themselves to the changing times.

Such deep resentment was to be expected from one who had experienced servility all his lifetime from the Indians, and discovered suddenly that that obsequiousness had disappeared.

He was brought back from his musings by Nicholson's voice.

“Do keep in touch with me, my boy. Write to the address I've given you and pass me all the news. Damn it all, man", the old policeman's voice grew husky and trembled audibly, "I cursed this country, I cursed its climate, its people, and well-nigh everything I could curse; I longed to go home for good. But now that the time has come, I feel a strange void within me for which I cannot account, because, and here his voice grew huskier and fell almost to a whisper, "although I cursed India, I love her. The reality of parting with her forever has brought me face to face with myself and the make-believe I had built up around me".

His eyes were unnaturally bright as he ceased speaking, and Ted became aware that, despite his gruff and stern exterior, Robert Nicholson was crying—that is, crying as much as a seasoned old veteran would permit himself to cry.

A lump arose in Ted's throat and he had to swallow hard. He forced himself to look out of the window, for it is difficult to witness a strong man's grief and yet remain unmoved. Nicholson was silent for a while. Then he opened the box of Trichinopoly cigars that lay on his table.

"Help yourself", he invited, and selected a cheroot. He lit it and when the tip began to glow puffed five or six times to ensure the cigar was burning evenly. Drawing in the smoke contentedly, he exhaled it in a thin blue stream and watched as it floated towards the roof.

"I hope I shall be able to buy these in England" he commented.

"Don't worry, sir", Ted remarked laughingly. "I'll send you boxes of them regularly. That's a promise".

"Thanks, Ted. And I'll send you something from home in return. Whatever you would like".

Both men ceased speaking and the cheap, Government-supplied clock ticked out the seconds loudly from the place where it hung on the wall of Robert's erstwhile office. He was thinking. Each minute brings my farewell to India nearer.

Then Nicholson took a slow, deep breath. "I'm going to say something now which I would not dream of telling any other man. But I want to say it to you, Ted, because . . ." and here he halted for a few seconds, "because I like you. I hope you won't be offended. If I tread on any soft spot please don't hesitate to say, 'shut up', and I'll close up like a clam. May I?" He looked up at Baker, his piercing brown eyes voicing his query.

"By all means go ahead, sir", invited Ted, wondering what was coming, "your advice is far too valuable' to resent".

"Well then, since you've asked for it. Keep away from that damned Greystone woman".

Robert Nicholson looked at Ted Baker squarely. The latter turned red and started to stammer a denial.

But Robert cut him short. "Look Ted, I'm an old man and I've seen life. There was a time when I was young like you, and as hot-blooded. I've had my little adventures with women".

A half-smile flitted over his lined face as his mind rolled back across the years. "I've been tempted myself, and I've seen women tempt men. And such a woman is Ruth Greystone. It's as obvious as the nose on your face that she's out to entangle you with her wiles. I saw that at your first visit. Listen. You must never let it happen, do you hear me! John Greystone is too fine a chap for one of us to seduce his wife, even if it's done unsuspectingly and unwillingly. John is a good fellow; while Ruth is a bitch".

Ted felt himself becoming angry at being forced to listen to all this. Just because he is my elder, and my official superior, doesn't mean that I have to allow him such liberties, he reasoned.

Nevertheless, Ted Baker said nothing.

Chapter 7
Introducing the Gardners

"Dad, I'm going riding in the jungle tomorrow. I simply can't be cooped up in this bungalow every day from morning to night because of a man-eater".

It was Saturday evening and the speaker, June Gardner, the Forest Ranger's daughter, voiced the words with determination.

"Nonsense, Junie", Neville Gardner snapped, "why, the very thought is absurd. Fancy riding about with a man-eater around! Have you forgotten what happened to poor Mr. Wyatt in the Nandyal district? At Diguvametta? Of course you were only a little girl then, about three or four years old. But my, you did have beautiful ringlets! How your poor mother used to admire them!" he paused reminiscently.

The forests around the Greystone plantation bordered the Silent Valley Reserve, a vast area of almost impenetrable jungle. There had been a transfer of Forest Rangers and Neville Gardner had taken charge from his predecessor hardly a month ago. Gardner was an Anglo-Indian and had spent twenty-five years in the Forest Department. He was a widower, Mrs. Gardner having died five years previously. Thereafter he had become solely dependent on his only daughter, June, now a girl of twenty-one. Unlike her father, who was of middle height and stockily built with a sallow complexion, drooping moustache; and unkempt black hair that he rarely combed, June was slim and tall, her brown skin mellowed by the sun into a glowing coppery hue. She had tantalizingly arched lips and flashing hazel eyes between curving black lashes. Dark silky hair hung loosely about her shoulders, helping to accentuate her strikingly oval face. A dimpled chin pronounced the charming smile she usually wore.

The Ranger's house was a low white-washed brick building crowned by a sloping roof of old-fashioned, half-round tiles, in keeping with the style of all Government quarters in South India. It had three rooms, a long front verandah, a bathroom, and attached kitchen, and was sparsely furnished.

His wife's memory was deeply cherished by Neville Gardner.

She had been a good companion and had accompanied him into every jungle in which he had been stationed from time to time. But the toll of malaria—the scourge of the Indian forests—had slowly undermined her strength and she had fallen an easy victim to cholera when that epidemic suddenly attacked her.

June had grown into a hardy girl, possessing a constitution like her father's, immune to the malarial parasite. Moreover, as was most unusual for one of her sex, she loved the jungle. She was a good shot with her .3006 Springfield rifle and knew all about the forest and its fauna. Range Officers are provided with horses by the Forest Department as part of their necessary equipment, and the only means of transportation to cover their long beats to the distant areas for which they are responsible.

Neville Gardner would leave his quarters on horseback early in the morning on inspection duty, carrying a tiffin-carrier of curry and rice that served as his lunch and a bottle of coffee. June had to get up at four o'clock every morning to prepare this meal.

The Gardners observed Sunday as an off day from work and June looked forward to it. She would finish her cooking overnight and dawn would find her in the jungle with her rifle on her father's horse. She loved wild animals and never shot anything that was harmless, carrying the weapon only for protection.

This was the kind of life June had been accustomed to at Chedleth, in Malabar, the last headquarters at which her father had been stationed. Situated in the Nilgiri-Wynaad, it had been a delightful spot, packed with game, and June had loved the beautiful jungle of towering evergreen trees and lofty swaying bamboo stems that clothed the forests of that area. Now, with her father's transfer, she very much resented the circumstances that curbed her usual Sunday morning routine of riding in the jungle.

For the Forest Guards had informed Gardner of the presence of a man-eating tiger in the vicinity. To go out alone on horse-back would be a hazardous undertaking and her father had forbidden her from doing so as soon as the news had been told to him. He himself went on his rounds armed with his Paradox gun. Because of the tiger's presence, work in the area had slowed down considerably, and contractors found it very difficult to procure labour for their felling and other duties.

The Ranger continued his narration. "Well, Mr. Wyatt was one of those officers recruited directly in England. Came out as District Forest Officer." He paused for a moment, then continued. "There was a man-eater at Diguvametta. It had eaten some six or seven of the Chenchu tribesmen living in the area. I doubt this young fellow had even seen a tiger before.

"One morning he mounted his horse and rode into the jungle. It was after 9 o'clock. I advised him not to go alone, but he replied that he wanted to exercise the animal. He said no tiger would come out in any case as the sun was up. In fact, it was a pretty hot day.

"About an hour later the horse galloped back. Its haunches were scored by the talons of a tiger and Wyatt was not on its back. We re-tracked in the direction from where it had come by following its hoof-marks and arrived at a spot where the jungle path Wyatt had been riding along passed through a nullah. That was where the tiger had been waiting for him. It had jumped from a bank on to the horse's back and had pulled him out of the saddle. In the sand were many marks—the stamping hoof-prints of the horse, the pugs of a large male tiger, and a drag mark that we knew had been made by Wyatt's boot as it trailed along the ground while the tiger carried him away. Just a little further on, we found blood. At first a few drops, and then more.

"There were four of us who had turned out; three Guards and myself. I was only a Forester in those days. I had brought my Paradox along with me—the same gun I have now. We followed the blood trail as quickly as we could, consistent with caution, hoping that by some stroke of luck we might be in time to save poor Wyatt's life. I remember we were terribly afraid."

"We had gone about a furlong when we caught sight of something white through the undergrowth. It was Wyatt alright. But he was dead. The tiger had ripped off his clothes and eaten a good part of him. A gruesome sight if ever there was one, and I can still see it in my mind's eye even as I talk to you. That's what comes of going riding in a jungle where there's a man-eater, and that's what'll happen to you".

Neville Gardner brought his narrative to an end with a note of finality. His daughter could not avoid an involuntary shudder as she heard the story. But after all—June was June, and a most

determined young woman. Whatever fear she might feel inside, she was certainly not going to show it to her father or anyone else. Her firmly pointed little chin took on a grim setting in the finely chiseled oval countenance when she spoke the next words with the air of a person bringing a long-drawn-out argument to a conclusion.

"As you say, Dad, he had just come from England. But I shall be careful and will keep to the fire-lines and not follow any of the narrow trails. I have my .3006 and I'm no greenhorn!"

"The .3006 won't save you, as man-eaters don't advertise their presence", countered her father. "He'll be on you in a jiffy".

"No, no, Dad; have no fear. I'll look after myself". June's voice had the well-known resolute note in it and her father had long ago resigned himself to the fact that, when the young lady made up her mind, it was useless to try to get her to change. Gardner loved his daughter intensely.

She was all that remained to him in this life. And because of that he had come to spoil her by giving in to her from young. So it was that, early next morning June rode into the jungle on her father's horse, her .3006 rifle across her back, the sling passing over the left shoulder and crossing her chest to the right, the leather strap taut between her breasts and accentuating their pointed loveliness within the khaki shirt she was wearing.

Chapter 8
The Fires of Revolution

Robert Nicholson had left on his voyage to England. Before going there had been a small party at the Greystone home when he had called to bid them farewell, and Ted had been present. It was clear that John was grieved at the old man's going and Robert Nicholson's last words were poignant with feeling.

"Good-bye, my boy. God bless you and I hope we meet again", he had said in a husky voice.

Ted Baker was thinking about these things as he sat at his office table. He missed his old chief strangely. Heavy footfalls down the corridor interrupted his meditations and he heard a tap on the door.

Ted said "Come in".

The door swung open to admit the Inspector, Ramchandra Rao, a fat Brahmin. There was a tremendous click of heels as he brought his heavy boots together and saluted. Then he commenced speaking excitedly.

"A message has just come from Ooparpet outpost, sir. It is stated a large crowd gathered there in front of the Police Station this morning, shouting very bad things against the English Government. As your honour knows, there is only one Havildar in charge with four constables. The Havildar told the crowd to get out. The blackguards started to hurl missiles of big dimensions, including stones. The poor Havildar; what could he do? So he and two constables proceeded to conceal themselves forthwith inside the lockup in the Police Station. The other two policemen endeavored to abscond. The badmash crowd there-upon made conflagration to the Police Station so that the concealed policemen came out 'cause of smoke and hot fire'. Then the rascal crowd began to '*marro* ' them. They beaten with big sticks, stones and heavy objects. The Havildar lost consciousness, with head broken. Maybe dead. The two police-wallahs badly hurt. Expected their arms, legs and heads seriously fractured also. Report was conveyed *ek dum* expeditiously by lorry-driver who was passing thro' Ooparpet and saw beatings. He done bunk before the crowd could apprehend him

and came '*juldy* ' to report matter".

"Good God!" Ted ejaculated.

He remembered Robert Nicholson had told him to expect trouble sooner or later. Then he thought quickly. There was no telegraphic communication between Nilambur and Ooparpet. He would have to act immediately. He knew he could muster a party of a score of constables. Of these, four were ex-military men and could use firearms. The rest were village recruits. According to the provisions of the law, the presence of a Magistrate was necessary to warn the crowd and read the Riot Act aloud before the Police could open fire, even in self-defence. This, Ted remembered bitterly, had been the cause of the loss of the lives of many policemen throughout India. They had been attacked by unruly mobs and beaten to death or burnt alive while their comrades had to stand by helplessly in the absence of a Magistrate. Ironically, he realised this was part of the 'British injustice' against which the Indians were clamoring.

"We will take an armed party to Ooparpet at once," Ted spoke rapidly. "Summon the Sub-Inspector and order all ranks on duty to fall in immediately. Tell the armoury sergeant to issue rifles with fifty rounds of ammunition to each of the ex-servicemen. Everyone will wear steel helmets and carry lathis. Also, requisition the first available conveyance. I'm going to fetch the Magistrate. Ask the doctor from the local Fund Hospital to bring his assistant and come along with us. There may be shooting; so tell him to bring stretchers and first aid kit".

The Inspector hurried out while Ted took his .38 calibre service revolver from the drawer of his table, twirled the drum around with his thumb to ensure it was loaded, and thrust the weapon into the leather holster strapped to his belt. Snatching up a box of twenty-five rounds, he crammed it into his pocket. Pausing for his helmet, he hurried down the corridor into the police station compound where, by this time, all was in a state of great activity with constables rushing here and there, some of them partially dressed in uniforms they were in the process of donning.

Robert had sold him the Buick at a knock-down price. Ted jumped into the car and drove out of the yard towards the Magistrate's bungalow that was about three quarters of a mile away.

The Magistrate, Mr. Choudri, was a Bengali. As Collector, he was the senior most Government official in residence and hence Ted's superior. He lived in a white, two-storied house with a high wall. As Ted drove in, the Gurkha orderly at the gate sprang to his feet and saluted. The next moment Ted was climbing the steps that led to Mr. Choudri's verandah. A Bengali servant came out and salaamed.

"Please tell the Magistrate *Sahib* that the D.S.P. is here and wishes to speak to him very urgently."

The servant bowed and went away. Within a couple of minutes Choudri appeared, a blue silk dressing-gown wrapped around his frame and slippers on his feet. In a few terse sentences, Baker told him the news, ending with the words, "I would suggest you come along, sir. We'll do all we can to persuade the mob to disperse, but they may become violent. I have only four men who are trained to use rifles. It would be dangerous if the crowd overwhelmed us."

Mr. Choudri was a short, fat man who generally wore a woolen suit regardless of the weather, accompanied by a grey felt hat at a jaunty angle and gold-rimmed spectacles attached by a thin gold chain to a button-hole in his waist-coat. He was quite a fair man and had a round, fleshy, clean-shaven face and was partially bald.

"Of course,", agreed the Magistrate, "I shall certainly accompany you. It is very necessary. Please wait". He disappeared into the house, returning in an incredibly short time dressed in his usual manner.

Choudri sat beside Ted as they drove hurriedly back to the police station to find the constables drawn up in two ranks. A Sub-Inspector flanked the first row at one end. The Inspector stood in front of the squad. His great belly made the khaki shorts he was wearing bulge prominently before him and stretch tightly across his rear.

The car drew up and Ted and the Magistrate alighted simultaneously. The Inspector called the police party to attention and saluted. The Magistrate returned the salute by raising his right hand to the brim of his felt hat.

Ted asked, "Inspector, have you issued fifty rounds to each of

the rifle-men?"

"Yes sir", replied the Brahmin, "and a bus has been requisitioned to convey the party. Also, the doctor and his assistant are here".

"Good; may we start, sir?" Ted turned towards Choudri.

The Magistrate inclined his head. Baker took over command of the police party. Most of them knew English to some extent, and he addressed them briefly in that language.

"I want you all to remain calm, keep together, and carry out orders". To the rifle-men, he said, "On no account should you fire until the Magistrate *sahib* has given the order".

The police squad piled into the waiting bus, which started on its journey to the Ooparpet outpost eighteen miles away. Ted and the Magistrate followed in the car, drawing ahead as they approached their destination. Everything seemed peaceful and there was no evidence that anything untoward had happened till they came into view of the small township itself. Then they noticed the black smoke spiraling upwards, and as they entered the straight stretch of roadway that ran through the town and formed the main street, they could see the smouldering ruins of the police outpost before them.

Gathered in the village square adjacent to the police chowki was an immense crowd of people all shouting and talking at the tops of their voices. They saw a figure made of what seemed to be rags and straw tied together, over which had been fitted a khaki tunic and the turban of a policeman. The crowd were in the act of setting fire to it. In the centre someone held aloft a long bamboo at the end of which fluttered a small flag, the emblem of the Nationalist Party, the Congress. It consisted of three colours; orange, white and green.

Ted brought his car to a halt and the Magistrate and he stepped out. The bus with the policemen stopped immediately behind and the police squad alighted hastily. At the same time the mob saw them and surged forward in a mass, shouting threats and obscene language.

Ted ordered his men to fall in, in two ranks, quickly, stationing two of the rifle-men in front at each flank. The

Magistrate and he took up their positions in the centre and a couple of paces ahead.

Choudri extended his hand with palm opened towards the mob and called, "Halt! In the name of the Law!"

The crowd slopped running but still moved menacingly forward. Someone from the rear pelted a large stone. It sailed over the heads of the constables and fell behind with a thud. That was the signal for more missiles to follow and they did so in right earnest. This time brick-bats, soda-water bottles and stones. A number fell among the policemen and blood gushed from the face of a corporal. A stone struck Ted just below his left shoulder and he felt the dull aching pain where it hit him. Choudri was reading the Riot Act when another stone grazed his head, removing his immaculate felt hat. It was swept away ludicrously.

The rabble began closing in and Ted realised that if they came any closer his party would be engulfed. They would be wiped out to a man.

"Load!" His order rang out, sharp and clear, and the bolts of the rifles of the four armed men clicked back in unison. Itching fingers rammed home a clip of five cartridges in each breach, and the bolts of the rifles clicked home again. Ted drew his revolver.

Choudri was still reading; but his voice was lost in the roar of the mob. The people at the front of the crowd observed the police action and stopped, but the pressure from the throng behind pushed them forward. Choudri finished reading. He turned to walk back when a broken bottle struck him on the neck. He fell to his knees and then got up. Ted stepped forward to cover him and fired two rounds from his revolver into the air. Momentarily the mob came to a halt.

The Magistrate was bleeding from the deep cut caused by the jagged glass, and his red blood showed up sharply on the natty grey coat. It seemed to infuriate the crowd, who howled in frenzy. With ashen face he turned to Ted to convey the formal command that left the matter thereafter in his hands.

"Superintendent, if they advance any further, shoot to kill", he ordered.

The howling increased and more stones descended. Then,

five thousand strong, the rabble charged the police.

"Aim!" called Ted; and then came the command, "Fire!"

The four rifles spoke as one, while Ted aimed his revolver at a huge man with a black beard who had been urging the throng forward with cries of "Kill them all", and was now in the act of hurling a stone. He squeezed the trigger. The man sat suddenly on the ground, clutching his chest. Four others from among the attackers also fell to earth. Blood squirted from between the fingers of the man Ted had shot. He held his breast and gazed accusingly, with rounded, reproachful eyes.

The shouting ceased abruptly. For a moment, the crowd stood glued to the spot, gaping in surprise at the horror of what had happened. Then it broke in all directions, leaving the five men who had been shot where they had fallen.

Ted turned to look at the Magistrate. He was standing behind, holding a silk handkerchief to the back of his neck. It was crimson and sodden with gore. Next, he looked at his policemen. The corporal who had been hit in the face was sitting hunched on the ground, his head buried in his hands, the blood seeping downwards to form a dark patch mat dried into the thirsty sand as rapidly as it fell. His brass-bound lathi lay beside him. The fat Brahmin Inspector was clutching his thigh, which was also bleeding. Five of the constables, including one of the rifle-men, were injured in one way or the other.

The crowd had melted away.

The injured policemen went, or were helped, into the bus. The death-rattle had set in when the bearded man shot by Ted was carried to the vehicle. Of the other four, one had been killed outright, two had been hit in their abdomens, and the fourth man high up in the shoulder.

The doctor and his assistant got busy with morphine injections and bandages. Ted, accompanied by one of the rifle-men and two lathi-armed constables, approached the burnt-out shell of the outpost to see what had become of the five policemen who belonged to it. They found one of them lying outside, his head beaten to a pulp by a big stone that lay beside the body, its surface still carrying evidence of the purpose for which it had been used.

The Havildar who was in charge of the outpost or what remained of him— had been tied to one of the wooden posts and burnt with the building. A third constable lay on his back, his stomach hacked open with the intestines spilling out and piled upon the sand beside him. There was no trace of the remaining two policemen.

Reluctant to leave those men behind to the fury of the mob when the police party departed and should they be still alive, Ted determined to find them at any cost. He could ill afford to waste time. His squad, weak as it had been in numbers from the start, was now sadly depleted and would not be able to stand up to a concerted attack should the rabble re-assemble and surround them. His only chance was to act quickly.

Advancing with his three men to the nearest row of houses they forced open a closed door. Inside an old man and woman, and a boy and girl, were hiding, the four of them huddled in the corner. Pointing his revolver at the boy and girl, Ted told the rifle-man to inform the old man and woman that he would shoot if they did not tell him what had happened to the remaining two policemen.

The grey-beard remained silent, his face scowling hatred, but the old woman broke under the threat. In a quavering voice, she said that the constables had tried to run away but had been pursued and caught. They had been thrown into a well at the end of the road; but whether they were alive or not when that happened, she did not know.

Ted inquired the whereabouts of the well and she volunteered to show it. She led them down the main street for some yards and turned to the right, along a lane. Risking the dangers of an ambush at any moment, the four men accompanied her till they came upon the well. They looked in. It was an ancient disused structure and nothing could be seen except the dark, green, forbidding water. But the scum and muck of fallen leaves floating at the top was now not in one continuous layer. It had been broken into gaps where the surface of the water was quite clear. This indicated that something had been thrown in recently. Ted had little reason to doubt that that something was the two unfortunate policemen, and that the old woman had told them the truth. The three constables accompanying him agreed.

The rifle-man gave vent to the rage within him. Turning

upon the old woman, he spoke between gritted teeth.

"Mother of a whore and daughter of a prostitute, is this the way you cowardly villagers, numbering thousands, murder five defenseless policemen who are servants of the Government and doing their duty? They are your own countrymen, don't you see? The Congress wallahs profess to be fighting to throw the *sahib-log* out of the country but murder Indians like yourself and me. Now I shall do the same to you". Thus saying, he seized his rifle by the muzzle and raised the butt aloft to batter the old woman to a pulp. Her broken voice rose in a frail, cackling scream.

Ted thrust his arm across the man's chest and restrained him. For a moment, the furies of mutiny flashed in the man's dark eyes, his sense of discipline forgotten. Ted appreciated the depth of his emotions and his voice was calm and conciliatory.

"I understand your anger and can agree with you. But she's old and defenceless. Also, she did not commit these dastardly acts. Let it never be said that you murdered a helpless old woman who was innocent".

His tact, and the logic of the argument, had its effect. The enraged policeman lowered his weapon, although a bit surlily. Baker noted the names of the woman and her family as possible witnesses and then went back to the bus.

The doctor was impatient at the delay in his return and did not hesitate to say so.

"Where've you been all this while, Superintendent? Don't you realize we have men who are bleeding to death aboard and that I have no available means to save them? They must be got to the hospital".

Ted snapped back, "Of course I realise. But don't you understand I couldn't leave the havildar of the outpost and his men to be torn apart by the mob without trying to find them? As it happens, they're all dead".

The doctor did not reply.

A party of policemen gathered the remains of the constable whose head had been smashed and the body of the other, after pushing his intestines, with the sand adhering to them, back into his belly. The corpse of the Havildar was very badly burned and could

not be moved. They tried, but the result was so ghastly as to make them desist. The cooked flesh came away in their hands.

The bus looked a gruesome sight. It literally dripped with blood. From the lips of those not under the effects of the morphine administered by the doctor, groans and moans came intermittently. The man whom Ted had shot had since died. His wide-open glassy eyes stared at the Superintendent accusingly. He found it impossible to face that terrible look.

Choudri sat huddled in the rear seat of Ted's car, the crimsoned silk handkerchief still pressed to his neck. He did not speak. The D.S.P. ordered the driver of the bus to start, and taking the lead himself in the car, the two vehicles commenced the return journey to Nilambur.

The wheels beneath seemed to drone out the futility of it all —this murder of innocent people, leading to the killing of other innocent people, who were probably not the actual culprits at all. Because of all this, he had shot a man that day! Was that murder? Perhaps if he had not killed the man first, the man would have killed him.

Then, undoubtedly it would have been murder. Why?

Perhaps because he was the D.S.P. Surely because he was a white man. And now was it murder? Or merely justifiable self-defence? Anyway, the man who had been killed was not the D.S.P. Moreover, he was not a white man. He was a black man.

Was that what made the difference?

Why did not the Government and the Nationalist leaders come to some understanding? The country was being steeped in blood. Was it wrong that Indians should demand the right to govern themselves?

Ted Baker was a very, very tired man when he finally drove into headquarters. The bus went directly to the hospital to unload its compliment of injured, dying and dead. The Magistrate got out there, too. Then Ted drove to the telegraph office to report developments to his immediate superior, the D.I.G. of Police at Calicut, telegraphing a copy of the report to the Inspector- General at Madras.

Chapter 9
Death at the Stream

The sun peeped its golden orb above the wavy line of tree-tops that rimmed the horizon while its warm rays began to dispel the mists that eddied wraith-like across the moist dew-spangled verdure of the forest floor as June, mounted on her father's horse, negotiated the road that led through the reserve in a southwesterly direction.

A herd of spotted deer scampered a few yards before her, the does accompanied by fawns of various sizes, tripping across the track to pause on the other side and gently nibble the luscious grass. Two medium-sized stags followed and then the master of the herd. He was a lordly sight; well-matured, a deep russet-brown in colour, and with antlers that spread in symmetrical curves to a length of forty inches. The white spots on his sides contrasted sharply against the background of jungle to render his dappled form a sight of splendour and beauty.

He saw the horse and stopped in mid-stride with head turned sharply in June's direction, throat and muzzle slightly uplifted as his nostrils quivered and dilated to sniff the morning breeze. Then his full-throated alarm rang out, "Aiow!" and again "Aiow! Aiow!" Instantaneously does and fawns vanished as did the stags to leave the scene empty. Not a rustle could be heard.

June smiled contentedly and loosened the reins in her hand, urging Tony, her mount, forward with a nudge of her knees. She was filled with the joy of living.

The crowing of silver-hackled jungle-cocks greeted her from the heavy trees that bordered the road to her left and sloped down into a verdant valley, as they hailed the rising sun. Their calls were intermingled with the sharply different and persistently provoking cries of spur-fowl. Away in the distance the cacophonous cries of pea-fowl answered one another, a fitting background of jungle music. Birds, large and small, twittered everywhere. Crested rosy-cheeked bulbuls chirped in the lantana bushes, a white paradise-bird with trailing tail of two long feathers flew into some clumps of bamboo that grew ahead, while a red fly-catcher bird showed itself

for an instant as it fluttered above.

Everything was peaceful and June rode on, keeping to the centre of the path. Consciously, as the distance from the forest-bungalow increased, she found herself becoming nervous at the thought of the man-eater. What if the brute was to suddenly spring from the jungle on either side?

She had gone perhaps three miles when the road bifurcated, a portion turning to the left and the other climbing uphill to the right. There was no sign-post to be seen. June had been told that an estate existed somewhere in the vicinity, but which of the paths led there she did not know. On an impulse, she decided to follow the one going to the left, hoping that it would not lead to the plantation. After some distance the track started going downhill and a little later she found herself on the bed of a stream.

At that time of the year it was just a trickle of water, burbling between boulders and purling over the lesser stones. Her mount crossed, his hooves splashing through and rattling on the loose pebbles. Then the track led upwards as it negotiated the further bank.

“Aarr-ooo-rongh!"

A snarling, blood-chilling, frightful roar rent the silence as Tony was climbing this. Then a ghastly scream rang out from the jungle to the right.

"Ar-ree-eee-aah! Ar-ree-eee-aah!"

The horse stopped for a moment and whinnied loudly, trembling in terror as it laid its ears back sharply. The scream was repeated, more agonised, appealing and piteous than before, to end in a series of gurgling, gasping sounds. There came a succession of deep-throated, worrying snarls.

June's horse bolted.

She tried to stop Tony but her efforts were fruitless. The terrified horse galloped madly forward to-put as much distance as he could between himself and that frightful sound which instinct told Tony had been made by the king of jungle-killers—a tiger!

And June knew a tiger had made them as it hurled itself upon some unfortunate animal, perhaps a sambar, whose life-blood

at that very moment was spilling upon the jungle sward while it died in dreadful agony in that sudden, cruel ambush.

She did not know how far they had gone when she sensed the horse slowing down. At the same time, she became aware that the usual vista of jungle undergrowth had given way to rows of tightly-packed coffee bushes growing between parallel lines of silver-oak trees, planted to provide them with shade. June realised that the turning she had taken had been the wrong one and led to the plantation she had been told about.

Just then a jeep rounded the corner ahead of her and approached, lurching along the broken track. It came nearer. Beneath the mud-stained tarpaulin hood Juno saw a European gazing at her. He was dressed in khaki and had the brightest grey-green eyes that ever she had seen.

John Greystone observed the wild-eyed appearance of the horse and the sweat that seeped through its skin to the surface in damp patches. He noticed the young lady who rode upon it and that her shirt was awry at the neck. Her wide-brimmed khaki hat had slipped off her head and was being held at the back by the chin strap now resting against her throat. John also perceived the rifle across her shoulder.

He brought the jeep to a stop as he drew abreast, and craning his head to the left, said a pleasant "Good-morning". June was surprised at the sight of this man before her.

When she heard his greeting, she tugged harder on the reins, and her mount, because of the human company they had met rather than the pull of his rider, came to a halt.

"Good-morning", she returned demurely.

Unaccustomed to the company of strangers, she felt distinctly shy.

John noticed this and sought to make conversation. "I can't help being curious. It's most unusual to meet a lady riding alone on these roads, even if she's armed". He smiled as his glance shifted to the weapon. And then he added, "I don't suppose you know there's a man-eater in this area".

To June he seemed so polite and nice. Besides, he was undeniably handsome.

"I'm the daughter of the new Forest Ranger", she explained. "We've heard about this man-eater and Dad was rather anxious when I came out riding this morning. But I wouldn't listen to him. Tony", she inclined her head to indicate that was the horse's name, "took fright just after we crossed the bed of a stream", and June went on to relate all that had happened.

"I wonder", she concluded, and John could see the tremor that passed through her frame, "if it could've been the man-eater".

Greystone's face became serious. "Good heavens! It probably was", he exclaimed. "There is one for certain and it has killed several of my coolies. From all reports, he's the only tiger in this area. I'm glad he found something to kill, or...or..." he hesitated, and then blurted out, "he may have killed you".

June did not answer. The pallor of her countenance beneath the brown skin indicated she had grasped the significance of his words.

"By the way", John went on, "I don't have the pleasure of knowing your name. I'm John Greystone, owner of this plantation. It's called Rob Roy Estate".

June replied, "My name's June Gardner".

"Would you care to ride down to the bungalow and meet my wife?" he inquired, "I'm sure Ruth would be delighted. You can also give Tony a rest. In fact,", he added in a serious tone, "I had better drive you back to wherever you live and the horse can be sent around later. It would be foolhardy to go back alone, don't you think?"

June's shyness made her inclined to refuse. But the idea of returning with Tony across that dreadful stream, bordered by dense jungle, where the tiger might still be lurking, was indeed terrifying; and in any case, she would like to meet another woman. Strangely, she found herself slightly resentful of the fact that that woman happened to be this rather nice man's wife.

"I'll come", she answered simply.

"That's nice", John heard himself saying, "Our bungalow is just a mile from here. If you canter ahead, I'll follow slowly in the jeep".

June persuaded Tony to break into a trot. Feeling himself safe, the horse had regained his composure and it was not long afterwards that she entered the grounds of the house and dismounted outside the portico. John had followed closely and advanced to take the animal's reins from her hand.

In the meantime, Ruth observed their arrival and came down the front steps, somewhat in wonder, to meet them.

"My wife—Ruth. This is Miss June Gardner", John introduced, going on to explain how he had met June.

"How thrilling!" exclaimed Ruth, "I would've been scared to death and fallen off the horse had I been in your place. Come in and tell me more about it".

"Yes, do come Miss Gardner", added John, "I'll attend to Tony".

The two women went into the verandah, where June settled herself in one of the large cane chairs and began telling her companion the details of her adventure. In a few minutes, John rejoined them.

After June had finished speaking, he said "We must invite Miss Gardner and her father to tea someday. She'll be company for you and I would like to meet Mr. Gardner. As a Forest Officer, I'm sure he must have many thrilling stories to relate".

Ruth was eyeing the girl closely while her husband spoke.

"Do you and your father live all alone in the jungle?" she queried.

"From the time I was born", June explained. "After mum died of cholera, daddy had no one to look after him and so I took her place".

"But don't you feel dreadfully lonely?" Ruth persisted, "don't you long for some form of social life; for company of some kind?"

June smiled, "No, I don't. On the other hand, we're happy and contented. In fact, I wouldn't know how to behave if I suddenly met a lot of ladies and gentlemen. You see, I'm not used to them".

June's frankness puzzled Ruth. Here was a girl who delighted in being alone while she was pining for company.

What made the difference?”

Then Ruth thought she found the solution.

"I've not been long in India, so please excuse me asking. You and Mr. Gardner—you're Eurasians, are you not?"

Perhaps that was what made the difference.

A tinge of colour rushed to June's face as she answered quickly, "We're Anglo-Indians".

"Is that so?" Ruth mused, and after a slight pause, “Eurasians and Anglo-Indians—what exactly is the difference?"

June felt herself becoming confused by these questions. Was this woman just curious or ignorant? Or was there hidden sarcasm in her tone?"

After some hesitation, she explained. "Eurasians are the descendants of English people who married Indians, while Anglo-Indians come from English stock who have settled and lived in India for a long time—like Dad and myself".

"I see", commented Mrs. Greystone. "You really must excuse my ignorance again, June. But how is it you are brown? Does the sun really do that to English people who live for long in India? Because if that's it, I shall have to look after my complexion".

Spoken quite unintentionally, the words went home. June turned a coppery red as she blushed beneath her tan. Tears of shame welled in her eyes. She tried to reply but could not. Springing to her feet, she turned and ran down the steps, passed the porch, and reached the drive-way.

John heard what his wife had said. He flushed hotly. "That was damned tactless of you. I asked the girl to come here thinking she might be a companion as you're always complaining of being lonely".

"So you brought me a Eurasian for company? That was thoughtful of you, indeed!" Ruth spat the words at him.

John did not answer. He followed June into the garden and found her beneath an acacia tree, sobbing silently.

Approaching, he coughed discreetly and murmured in a low tone, "I'm awfully sorry, Miss Gardner, for my wife's rudeness. You

see, she's a new-comer to India and doesn't understand these things. Believe me, she did not realise the hurtfulness of what she said".

June spun around, her fists clenched in anger, knuckles contrasting whitely against the brown skin. Tears glistened on her black eye-lashes and rolled down her cheeks, splashing upon the khaki shirt and marking the material.

By God, John realised, this girl is beautiful! She looked an object of sadness and pity. Yet there was something of grandeur in her squared shoulders and defiant stance.

"Whether she meant it or not, she has shown how you English people feel towards us. You despise us because we're dark. I'm a half-caste Eurasian girl. There is Indian blood in my veins".

To John she appeared all the more beautiful.

Furiously, June continued. "And I'm proud of it. I hate your kind of people".

When she stopped for breath, he began, "Listen, Miss Gardner, I'm most frightfully sorry and apologise…"

"Save your apologies for someone of your sort", she cut in abruptly, "please show me where you've kept my horse".

"Great Scott! You don't mean to tell me you are going to ride back alone! What about the tiger?"

"Hang the tiger!" June snapped, "at least he's not a snob. What's more, thank God he's Indian—too!"

John did not reply as she brushed past him and walked to the rear of the bungalow. There she saw Tony tethered in the motor-shed. June untied the reins, climbed into the saddle, and rode up the drive without even a backward glance.

As she passed, John called after her, "By the way, Miss Gardner; I was born in India, too".

About an hour later Tony came to the place where the tiger's roars had frightened them that morning. June kept a tight grasp on the reins. Inwardly she quailed, but outwardly exulted she had shown that horrid English couple she preferred risking an encounter with the dreaded tiger to remaining a minute longer in their ill-mannered company.

It seemed a pity that she had thought Greystone to be a nice man—and handsome, too, with lovely grey green eyes.

But so are cobras pretty to look at, she ruminated —and frowned at the idea.

June met no man-eater.

Chapter 10
And the Fires of Passion

Ted Baker sat in his office, smoking. He had already finished two packets of Capstans and the fourth cigarette from a fresh pack now drooped between his lips. He was disconsolate and irritable.

The official reports about the happenings at Ooparpet had brought quick results. Fifty Armed Reserve policemen had been rushed there. Another fifty had come to Nilambur in a Black Maria, and their tents occupied the large compound of the Police Station.

He thanked God Choudri had been present when the shooting had taken place. The Collector had been injured himself, had he not? Then, why should any further questions be asked about the damned incident? Was his senior not there to explain? Or was it because he was a Britisher— whereas Choudri was an Indian? Did it make any difference? Would the Congress Party try to make capital out of that?

Damn it all, if the police had not opened fire when they did all of them would have been murdered. He would have been the only white man killed to about twenty-five Indians including the Magistrate, the doctor, and the police squad. Did the silly buggers think of that?

Ted felt he needed someone to chat to at that moment to get the load off his mind. If only Robbie had been here. He could not help smiling to himself as he imagined the sort of reply the old man would have given him.

"Only hit five of 'em, my boy? Bloody poor shooting, I call it! I would've emptied my revolver into the crowd. At least a round dozen of the bastards should have been laid out".

Poor old Robbie. He loved to appear tough. Inside, Ted knew him better; sentimental, helpful, and very very human.

Baker climbed to his feet and donned the leather belt accommodating the holster in which reposed his loaded revolver. Due to the state of furore throughout the country, all police officers had been ordered to carry arms. An attack might come at any time and from any place. Ramming his khaki topee on his head, he

strode out of the office to his car, parked under the shade of a nearby peepul tree, climbed in, and pressed the self-starter. The engine roared to life and in a cloud of dust he drove through the wide gate pillars of the station compound on to the yet more dusty road.

It was a long distance to Rob Roy Estate but he would find pleasant company awaiting him there. He glanced at his watch and saw the time was just 8:45. Perhaps John would be out on the plantation and Ruth would be alone. In which case.....

Ted pressed a little harder on the accelerator and the Buick responded to his urging like some living thing that understood his innermost want—a want he was afraid to admit even to himself.

Ruth Greystone was delighted when she recognized the Buick. John had gone out as usual to supervise the coolies and she was alone.

Ted's mind was still in confusion when he saw her standing outside the front door.

"Hello, Ted. It's nice to see you", she greeted.

"Morning Ruth", he returned, stepping out of the car and slamming the door, "is John home?"

"No. He's out on the plantation. Do come in".

This time she led him past the verandah, into the cool recesses of the drawing room. "Sit there, on that sofa. I shall join you as soon as I've mixed the drinks".

"Make mine a whisky please. I need one in the terrible mood I'm in at this moment".

"What's wrong?" she queried, looking down at him, her dark eyes watching his face. "Any bad news?"

"Get that drink please, and I'll tell you all about it".

She served Ted and sat down beside him, resting her tumbler on her knee. He thought she looked very attractive in the pink-flowered mercerised cotton frock she was wearing.

"Actually I'm browned off and came here to have a chat with you and John. As you know, you're the only English people living near Nilambur, and this is an occasion when I need the company of

my own kind.

"But let me begin at the beginning", and Ted recounted the recent events at Ooparpet.

"How very dreadful!" exclaimed Ruth when he had finished, "we heard something about it. Fancy killing those five policemen! The culprits deserve what they got".

"But most likely the people we shot had nothing to do with the murder", Ted went on. "They just happened to be standing in front. Information gained indicates that the incident had been worked up by two unknown men who stirred the people into violence and then vanished".

"Haven't you been able to find out more about them?"

"We've been given a sketchy description of the blighters. The car they travelled in had a Calicut number plate, but nobody seems to remember the numerals.

"As a matter of fact", Ted continued, "news of the riot will spread all over and we may expect trouble anywhere now. I hope John has no difficulty with his labourers. The authorities feel the same way, as they have sent down a hundred armed policemen. Needless to say, the brass hats are harassing me with countless questions while I make repeated reports about what happened".

Ruth was silent for a little while. "Poor Ted", she soliloquised, speaking almost to herself; and then, looking up and addressing him, she added, "Well, don't let it worry you unduly. It's a pity a nice boy like you is not back in England instead of being out here, in this wretched country, in danger of your life. I for one wish I had never set foot here".

They were both silent for a while. Ted looked at his boots, his forehead puckered in thought; while Ruth gazed at him, searching his face with her eyes.

Then she broke the silence. "I have a brilliant idea. Take me for a drive, Ted. It will clear away the cobwebs and freshen us both up while helping to get your mind off this nasty subject".

"Certainly", he responded, "where would you like to go?"

"Oh, just anywhere, if only to get out for a bit". They rose together, walked down the verandah steps and, with Ruth sitting

next to him he drove the Buick down the road he had just travelled.

Three miles along this road was a branch track leading north. Seven miles further this terminated at the top of a flattish hill. From that spot a beautiful view was obtainable of the surrounding country, with mountain ranges to the north and jungle-clad hills and dales all around.

Ted stopped the car under a large ficus tree and the two of them alighted. It was a deserted spot as few travelers came this way.

He offered Ruth a cigarette and lit it for her. Then they sauntered to where half-a-dozen low trees at the upper edge of a descending shola invited more seclusion and cool shade from the scorching rays of the sun that was blazing in a cloudless sky.

"Still no signs of the blessed monsoon", Ruth grumbled as she seated herself on the grass, motioning Ted to sit beside her, "that's what John says every morning as he studies the heavens before setting out. I wonder what it'll be like when it comes. I've heard so much about the monsoon that I'm dreading to experience it".

"I don't expect conditions will be as bad as they are painted", Ted laughed.

"Fancy you and me together", Ruth murmured, "an English boy and girl in this god-forsaken land". She looked up at him quizzically.

"As I've told you, I rather like India", he replied after some moments, "if only it were not for my police duties, particularly at a time like the present, I think I could be very happy here".

"Can't say I agree with you, one bit. I miss England tremendously. John is absolutely no comfort in that respect. Except for being English by birth, he is perfectly at home here; while I—I feel so lonely and forgotten".

She glanced at him longingly, pensively. It was the age-old look of the female, silent and enticing, obviously soliciting the sympathies of a protector.

Ted felt that gaze and removed his helmet to hide his confusion. He laid it on the grass and turned to face Ruth. How tantalising she appeared with her full, red lips, pale face and dark

eyes, her black hair tied in the accustomed pony-tail style she favoured. So slim —so very much the woman. The scent she used—'Evening in Paris'—was wafted to his nostrils.

Ted understood what she wanted at this moment; and realised, with a shock, that he had come there in the secret hope of giving it. He bent and pressed his lips down on hers, and as he entwined his arms about her willing body, her's in turn clung to him, one soft hand gently, temptingly smoothing the ruffled hair over his fevered temples, her mouth wet and half-opened with desire.

Ted breathed hard as longing welled within him and saw response in Ruth's glazing, hungry eyes. He crushed her to him in a paroxysm of passion, and wrapped together they sank to the grass. She felt his questing hand slide under her jumper and his fingers cup her breast. Then his palm squeezed it tightly.

"Oh Ted!" she gasped, "you're hurting me".

But he was now pulling her jumper to her neck. She squirmed on to her back and pretended to close her knees as he released the hooks of her skirt and wrenched it down over her feet. Then he fell upon her, forcing her knees apart, his fingers between her thighs. Ruth's legs opened to receive him and she arched herself upwards in ecstasy.

In gasps, she urged him, "Go on; go on".

The natural verdure hid the scene as the rhythm of his passion increased in tempo to its eventual climax. There they lay, spent, in each other's arms till time, renewing the passions within, once again aroused them to the frenzies of love.

An hour dragged by. They got up then, exhausted but with a sense of having fully satisfied the fires of their mutual desires.

Slowly they returned to the Buick.

John had finished his lunch by the time Ted and Ruth reached the bungalow.

Chapter 11
The Muffled Visitors

Placing his mouth close to the opening where the door fitted into its wooden frame, the man called softly,

“Raman! Raman!" interjecting the words by gently shaking the door with his hand.

It was close on midnight and the coolie-lines on Rob Roy Estate were hushed in silence. Very occasionally a pie-dog whimpered or barked outside. Inky-darkness was everywhere and not a light glimmered.

Raman Nair, covered from head to foot in a chequered blanket, lay sound asleep on the floor of the hut that had been made over to him by its tenants as the guest of honour of the community. He snored, the sound reverberating through the closed room.

The faint tapping continued. The figure outside, draped in a long grey blanket, was becoming impatient. He had been trying to awaken the sleeper without disturbing the people in the neighbouring huts, but his efforts had been in vain and the deep snoring within tended to become even more stertorious.

He tapped persistently till Nair awoke with a start and pulled the blanket off his head. It was pitch dark in the hut and he heard the whispered words coming from outside in soft, urgent tones, "Raman Nair! Raman Nair!"

"Who are you?" he called nervously.

There was a grunt of annoyance and the voice replied, "Open in the name of the Party; and hurry! The neighbours will hear us".

Party? Party? What party? And then enlightenment came to Nair's sleep-fogged brain. Hastily scrambling to his feet, he lit the smoke-begrimed lantern on the floor and drew the wooden-bar that closed the door from the inside.

Hardly giving him time, the blanket-clad figure slid into the room, unceremoniously pushing Raman aside and closing the door behind him. He stood with his back to the entrance and said in

rasping undertones, "Do you eat so much that you sleep so soundly; or perhaps you've had a good tot of coconut toddy? I've been trying to awaken you for fifteen minutes, making noise enough to disturb half the settlement. You certainly appear to be leading an easy life. Are you alone or have you some woman here also?"

Raman Nair was taken aback. Then he became indignant—very, very indignant. His words, spoken in Malayalam, gushed forth in a torrent from between clenched teeth, "Who do you think you are, fellow, to speak to me, the respected Raman Nair who holds the position of a leader in the Party, in such an insolent manner?"

"Shut up, and don't talk so loudly", responded his mysterious visitor, "who called you a respected leader? You're but a servant in the great cause, just as I am". And then, in a more conciliatory tone, he added, "Comrades Papachen and Chacko, from Calicut, want you immediately. They are waiting in a car on the road".

"Papachen and Chacko? Who are they? Why should they call me at this time of night? And who are you?" The questions tumbled in quick succession from the surprised Raman.

"How should I know who they are!" replied his visitor testily. "In the Party one shouldn't ask too many questions. I don't know myself who they are or why they want you. And my name doesn't matter, anyway".

Raman Nair hesitated for a moment and then slipped his feet into his chappals before extinguishing the door of the hut noiselessly. He followed the tall stranger into the blackness of the night as he strode along the path leading to the road.

When they had gone a little distance, curiosity got the better of him and Raman asked. "How did you know my name and which hut I occupied?"

"Keep quiet and don't ask silly questions", came the cryptic reply.

Eventually they arrived at the road. A black shape loomed before them. When he reached it Nair discovered it to be a motor car. The canvas hood was up and he could see a figure hunched over the steering-wheel. At first, he was unable to make out whether the rear seat was occupied or not, but his doubts were set at rest when a low voice from the darkness there said, rather than

asked, "You're Raman Nair of the Party, are you not?"

Raman answered, "I am. And who are you?"

"That's no concern of yours, comrade", came the rejoinder. "It is sufficient to say that the Party feels you have been here long enough while no action has resulted. If there is one thing the Party demands, it is action".

Raman Nair was aghast. He was also furious. The first stranger had spoken to him as if he was a mere nobody. Now someone else was doing the same thing. He determined to find out who this someone else might be.

With that purpose in view, he stepped closer to the rear door of the tourer. Then it was that he saw not one, but two figures, seated inside. The man nearest to him on the left side of the car wore an army great-coat, while his head was wrapped in a muffler. The other was rolled up in a blanket from head to foot as was also the driver of the car in the front seat.

The voice spoke again, and Raman noted that it was the great-coated figure who was doing the talking.

"The villagers of Ooparpet organised action some three days ago. They burned down the police-chowki and killed all the policemen. Now it's the orders of the Party that you should bring about an immediate strike on this estate. After that, something else will be done, somewhere else. We must give the white dogs no rest whatever till they are driven from our land".

"Yes, news reached me of the rioting at Ooparpet", admitted Nair. "I was told that it had been caused by two strangers from Calicut who gave out that they were liberty-workers of the Malabar Congress Organization.

“Are you them?" Raman asked the question bluntly.

"What if we are—or are not? Does it make any difference to you?" snapped the great-coated figure.

His companion then spoke for the first time, his voice coming from the recesses of the blanket. The tones were soft, silky—but strangely devoid of expression. "We are members of the Party. That is sufficient for you to know. And we want action from you—within the next forty-eight hours! Arrange that, and there will be money

for you. On the other hand, should nothing happen—well, it may not be so healthy for you, brother".

His voice became even more soft, even more silky. But it was no longer expressionless. A wealth of sinister meaning lay in the words of the final sentence as he uttered them.

Raman was silent. Deep resentment welled within him, but the calm self-assurance with which the man had spoken, his sibilant and malign tones, had their effect. He recognised he was in the presence of a powerful personality. His rising indignation dissolved before that power.

"I will do my best, sir", Nair stuttered meekly, and then he began to cringe, "but it is difficult to get these complacent folk excited to that degree. They are ignorant for one thing; and they are simple people".

His words and manner—if he had expected them to have any placating effect on the persons in the car, produced just the opposite result. The man leaned forward across his companion and spat over the side, past the standing Raman. His soft voice lost its quality and became icy and menacing.

"Comrade, we are not concerned with the difficulties of your problem. We are only concerned with results. Within forty eight hours a disturbance of some sort must take place on this estate—the poor coolies must rise against the cruel white oppressor that grinds them down—they may kill him and his wife—or at least burn down his house—or ....." here he thrust his face closer, and through a gap in the folds of the blanket Raman saw a lean, clean-shaven countenance, long and refined, with two deeply-set eyes that glittered at him even in that gloom…"You will have the Party to reckon with". The final words were hissed at him.

The speaker then relaxed. Motioning with one hand to the man who had fetched Raman, and who had not spoken a single word all this time, he said, "Get in"; and bending forward, prodded the crouching driver on his back, ordering, "Start; and drive on".

The driver straightened himself and started the engine, while the individual who had been with Raman climbed into the seat next to him and closed the door. The head-lights cut into the gloom as the vehicle chugged into the night, leaving Raman alone on the

roadside.

He retraced his steps towards the coolie-lines, wondering how he was going to carry out this latest assignment. Start a riot; kill the *sahib* and *mem-sahib* ; burn the bungalow! Just like flicking a thumb and finger together! Was it so easy? And were these the principles of non-violence that Mahatma Gandhi was preaching?

And then Raman Nair caught up with his own thoughts. No! Very definitely they were not. But these were the very ideas that he himself had been propagating; and now he had to put them into effect within forty-eight hours!

Truly, Raman Nair was caught in his own net. Suddenly another thought came into his mind. It was terrifying.

The man-eater!

He had been told the dreadful animal inhabited this very area. It was reported to be here, there and everywhere. In the excitement of the recent happenings he had not even thought about this awful menace. Now he remembered it.

He was alone! It was long past the hour of midnight! He was in pitch darkness, surrounded by the thick coffee bushes where the man-eater might he lurking.

Raman Nair panicked. He broke into a wild, unheeding run that only ceased when he snatched open the door of his hut, hurled himself inside, and closed it fast behind him by slipping the wooden bar into place.

Truly, it had been a most unfortunate night.

Chapter 12
Chicka, the Jungle Man

Chicka was a Karumba, one of a tribe of aboriginal jungle-folk dwelling in the dim, ever-green forests at the foot of the Nilgiri Mountains and the adjacent jungle areas. No one exactly knows where the Karumbas come from. They are of Dravidian descent, speak the Tamil and Kanarese dialects, and live strictly to themselves. They are short, dark, sturdy people, with coarse features, the women wearing their sarees tied above their breasts and hanging to the ground in the fashion of a very long sarong.

Chicka was a young man but did not know his age. No aboriginals know that. He had long, black matted hair which he avoided washing as that necessitated the effort of combing and drying it. He preferred the hordes of lice that lived there. A few stubby hairs on his chin promised to become a beard in course of time. He had a straight nose between two shiny but eager and honest black eyes. His only clothing was a small 'moocha' of dirty rag that covered his nakedness in front and came up between his buttocks to be tied on to the same waist-string around which it had been looped in front. And his sole possessions were a sharp, short-handled axe and the ragged remnants of a rough blanket.

He had left his home in the village of Thala a month ago, in search of employment and had by devious paths entered Rob Roy Estate one morning. Here he hoped to be able to secure a job.

As Chicka turned a corner in the narrow track winding through the plantation, he came upon a curious spectacle. Several coolies were gathered in a knot, all talking together. A white man stood among them. Obviously, the *dorai* had come in the jeep that was drawn up at the side of the path. Between the legs of the men, the Karumba noticed a figure lying on the ground.

His first impulse was to step aside into the coffee bushes and watch unobserved. But then came the thought that by doing so he would never succeed in his purpose. Perhaps this was a golden opportunity to meet the white man and ask for work directly. So he walked boldly forward and joined the group.

The cause of the confusion was then revealed. A coolie had been bitten by a cobra. The *sahib* , who proved to be the owner of the estate, was passing in his jeep and the other coolies had called him. Apparently, no one knew exactly what to do.

"When was he bitten?" Greystone asked the group in general. Perhaps there was some chance to save the man's life by lancing the wound and tying a ligature.

But the reply dashed all hopes to the ground. "Well over an hour ago, *dorai* . In fact, it happened some distance from here and we were carrying him to the coolie-lines when you came along".

John realised that nothing could save the poor fellow's life. He was doomed. The nearest hospital with anti-snakebite serum was over a hundred and fifty miles away and the man had less than sixty minutes to live.

"I have no medicine", he told them sadly.

Fatalistically, they raised the swooning man to their shoulders, and continued their journey. Soon their jabbering died away and the white man and the jungle man were left alone.

Chicka raised his two hands with palms together to his forehead till his thumbs touched it, in respectful greeting. John Greystone acknowledged the gesture with a friendly nod and smile.

Silence followed for a few seconds as they took stock of each other.

Then John asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?"

The reply was to the point. "I'm Chicka, a Karumba from the hamlet of Thala, near Bandipur. I have been beaten and turned out from home because I refused to marry the girl my father had chosen for me. I love another. Now I seek employment".

They were conversing in Tamil. John asked, "How did you come here?"

"I walked", was the simple answer.

"Were you not afraid of the man-eating tiger that haunts this place—or some jungle demon?"

"I'm not afraid of tigers. They're my companions. As for

demons; the only sort I know are made of flesh and blood and have two legs".

John laughed at this quaint answer. Turning to Chicka, he invited, "Get into the jeep. We'll follow and see how the bitten man progresses".

The engine roared to life and John drove towards the coolie lines.

"What kind of work can you do?" he inquired.

"Any kind of work your honour chooses to give me", came the ready response. Then, "Perhaps I may be able to assist you to shoot the tiger".

Greystone grinned at the smart answer. He knew it was the greatest temptation Chicka could have put forward to secure himself a job.

"Alright, I'll give you a trial", he agreed.

The Karumba turned frank eyes upon him and said bluntly, "But your honour should first know I have been responsible for making the girl whom I love pregnant". Hi voice was anxious, for he did not know what reaction this news would bring.

This time John laughed outright. He could not help admire the straight-forward candidness of this little man and said. "That happened before you became my servant. Therefore, it’s no concern of mine. But if you repeat the offence while you are in my employment, I shall dismiss you. Till then, I appoint you as my personal shikari".

He chuckled again and noted the satisfied grin on the little Karumba's face.

They overtook the group who were carrying the snake-bitten man shortly before they reached the coolie lines. John drove ahead and halted the jeep beside the raised platform under the peepul tree. He noticed a short, dark man squatting there, dressed in a white cotton banyan with a dhoti around his waist. The man did not attempt to acknowledge John's arrival with a salaam, nor did he even stand up as was the accustomed habit when the employer visited the lines. He remained seated on his haunches and glared at him. Greystone observed him rather absent-mindedly, for his

thoughts at that moment were entirely about the coolie who had been bitten by the cobra. Poor devil, he mused, to have to die with no medical assistance. There was just nothing anyone could do about it.

Meanwhile the little group of men arrived. News of what had happened spread, and the victim's old mother, wife, and two young children commenced wailing as they gathered around the unconscious coolie. The wife ran into her hut, returning in a few moments with a lotah of hot milk which she tried to force between her husband's clenched teeth.

Up to this time, the stranger on the platform under the peepul tree had not uttered a word. Raman Nair— for indeed it was he—was an opportunist. He had been cudgeling his brains for a sufficiently strong reason that would incite the coolies into murdering their master and his wife and burning their home. He would, have to find that reason by evening for he had arranged another meeting with the coolies at six o'clock.

At first, he considered Greystone's arrival as an unfortunate distraction. Now his nimble and crooked mind saw in it a God-sent opportunity. Raman Nair rose to his feet. In clear, ringing tones he addressed the gathering in general.

"Hearken to me, brothers! Remember what I told you the other day? "It is because of the white man over here that this misfortune has happened. Your own flesh and blood, your own brother, this coolie, was working for the foreign devil, when the cobra bit him. What is about to happen now?"

He asked the question in a high-pitched scream to the gaping assembly around him and then hastened to answer it himself. "Why, the poor man will surely die. Then, who will feed his wife, his two children, his old mother? Nobody! And what will happen to them? They will starve to death! And what will happen to the white man? Nothing! Ha, and his pale-faced wife, and all his greedy sort will go on living on the fat of the land, sucking the blood of us poor Indians like the accursed leeches that the English are, while you poor folk and your beloved wives and little children continue to suffer, starve and die".

Raman Nair began to really warm to his subject. He went on, "Why is all this happening? That question is easy to answer. It’s

because we Indians have no courage to rise in the might of our millions and kick these white people out of our land—kick them right out into the sea—or kill them on the spot".

His voice rose higher and higher and ended in a frenzied shriek of pure hatred as he was carried away by his own vehemence.

John listened in silence. He was too amazed, too thunderstruck, to even think of interrupting.

Chapter 13
The Plot Thickens

The air was hot and sultry although it was midnight. Crickets chirruped loudly and the croaking of a solitary bull-frog from the rivulet behind the Forest Ranger's quarters were the only sounds that disturbed the brooding jungle.

June lay awake on the narrow cot that was her bed. She was sweating profusely beneath the additional heat caused by the green-hued mosquito net that enveloped her recumbent form. She heard the frog and knew that his solo notes would in time become a chorus, sung by hundreds of frogs that would line the stream when it became a raging torrent, swollen by the expected monsoon.

Her father was sleeping in the next room and his deep breathing intruded upon her thoughts. A lantern burned dimly in the doorway between, casting long velvety black shadows across the wall opposite her, spookish through the meshes of the curtain.

June was troubled. For some reason she could not understand, a face kept appearing in her mind, in which a pair of grey-green eyes looked at her. It belonged to a man who was driving a jeep—the face of John Greystone—husband of that horrid Englishwoman.

As she lay thinking, she heard the chugging of a motor car and wondered who could be driving it. Perhaps it was the jeep. Perhaps John Greystone was coming to visit her. It was a pleasant thought and she lingered on it awhile.

The drone of the engine grew louder and nearer. She heard the squeak of brakes. Next came the voices of men speaking in undertones from the quarters of the Indian Forester and the five Forest Guards who lived with their families adjacent to the Ranger's bungalow.

June strained her ears to catch the words, but the curtain and the distance of the window from her bed muffled them. A few moments she lay thus, wondering who the visitors at this time of night could be, and what they might want. Then curiosity overcame her and she got out of bed and walked to the window.

It was too dark for her to see anything. A few words, here and there, floated to her hearing, and being conversant with Tamil she had no difficulty in understanding their meaning.

The Forester was speaking. "But what you ask us to do is impossible. We are servants of the British Raj. If we listen to you, we will get into serious trouble. The Ranger *Sahib* will report us and we will be dismissed if not put in jail. We will lose our pensions. Who will feed our families? Will you, or the people you represent?"

There was silence for half a minute.

A strange voice began to reply—peculiar in its intonations—it was sibilant and had an unaccountable quality of toneless, malevolent silkiness. The speaker seemed to hiss the words like a snake.

"It's because of rats like you, who serve the accursed white men, that we Indians who are struggling and sacrificing all for the freedom of our country, find it difficult to make headway. Don't you realise that the millions of this great land are uniting and will shortly drive the foreigners out? Then, where will you be? If you join us now, there will be promotion and a position of responsibility awaiting you in the new government. But if you do not; if you remain loyal to the British; what will you do when they leave India? Be very very sure they won't take you with them. They'll desert you —leave you behind—with us! We will reap vengeance upon you when that day comes. We'll treat you as traitors to the motherland!"

The voices went on and on in their argument. June's first thought was to awaken her father and tell him what was happening. She knew that the secret agents of Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party were everywhere, stirring up rebellion against the Government, against the British, against white people in general. Her father's sympathies had been her own; and like those of the million or more Anglo-Indians throughout the peninsula, strongly pro-British.

Had she heard the conversation a few hours earlier, June knew her reaction would have been to awaken her father and drive the strangers off, if necessary at the point of a gun. But something had happened that very morning. Something shocking. It had been a blow to her. Nevertheless, it had brought her face to face with herself.

A white woman—an Englishwoman—one of the ruling race to whom she had always given her unstinted loyalty had disillusioned her.

She had been angry at the time. She had been resentful. She had even wept. Now all of a sudden, the truth dawned upon her. What the Englishwoman had said was a fact. The white folk despised people such as her and her father. They looked down upon them because they were dark; because they were Eurasians.

She was, after all, an Indian herself!

God's truth; there was not the slightest doubt about it! Then why should her sympathies lie with the English? Rather, they ought to be with the strangers outside, and people like them, who were trying to free this country which was her very own as much as it was theirs, from the bondage of British rule; from the yolk of the white foreigners who despised Indians and Anglo-Indians alike!

The men outside were not traitors as she once would have considered them. They were patriots. The muffled voices broke in once more upon her hearing. The same man was speaking again.

"Are you aware that a few days ago, the townsfolk at Ooparpet burned down the police Station, killing all the five policemen who were loyal to the Government? Had those men denounced the British and joined the freedom fighters, they would have been alive today. But they were foolish and didn't do so. Now they are dead. Will the English bring them to life again? Will the British Raj feed their families? Do you want the same thing to happen to you? Join us before it's too late. Within the next forty-eight hours the coolies on the coffee estate are going to rebel. They will burn the bungalow with the white man and his wife in it as a warning to these foreign dogs to get out of our country before they meet with a similar fate. Think it over seriously. We'll return soon. Then you must join us—and act!"

The mumbling ceased and June heard the car move off into the jungle night. Soon the beat of its engine faded away in the distance. Her thoughts were filled with confusion. She had just overheard the horrible fate that lay ahead for the planter and his wife. John Greystone, the man with the grey-green eyes who had met her that morning and whom she had thought to be so nice; and Ruth his wife, who had disillusioned her. A plan that was only part

and parcel of the much bigger move to drive the English out of India—the India that was her mother-land!

What should she do about it?

Chapter 14
Kill the White Man and Burn his House

Fate appeared bent upon playing an unkind trick on John Greystone. While he was listening to Raman Nair's impassioned tirade, a man came running to announce that the man-eater had struck again. Another victim had been claimed—this time a woman—from among the coolies working at a remote corner of the estate.

The news halted the Malayali in the midst of one of his bitter sentences. But he stopped for a second only.

Turning with flashing eyes, he pointed an accusing finger at Greystone and shouted, "There stands the man who's responsible for the death of this woman and those others before her. She worked for him. The tiger has killed and eaten her. Now he remains unmoved, and does nothing".

His words began to take effect on the assembled coolies and their families. Murmurs of anger and accusation could be heard. In a throng, they closed around Greystone.

Some asked, "What have you to say?" "Are you going to compensate her family?" Other voices growled, "Get out! Quit India!"

This distraction caused the man who had been bitten by the snake to be left unheeded while his companions gathered to listen to the new development. Raman Nair's sharp eyes caught sight of the prostrate form and he decided to clinch matters.

"Not only has a poor woman died today in the service of this outsider, but another of our brethren lies at the portal of death". He pointed dramatically to the unconscious man.

The crowd glanced at him and at the recumbent figure. Threats could be heard on all sides. Then they regrouped around the dying man. Two of them forced his mouth open to insert the rim of the brass lotah with the milk brought by his wife, and the liquid was poured down his throat. The man twitched spasmodically and commenced to gasp. Foam flecked his lips. A rasping gurgle issued from his throat in jerky, irregular time with the opening and closing of his mouth.

A little later he was dead!

"Another victim to the white man's presence in our land", screamed the voice of Raman Nair.

Threatening shouts came from all directions as the mob closed around the jeep.

Greystone sat motionless, his elbows on the steering wheel. He seemed stupefied by the happenings and did not realise his danger.

One person kept his head. That was Chicka. He shook John's shoulder vigorously and said in an undertone, "Get away from here quickly. In another minute, it'll be too late. They'll kill you!"

Greystone came to his senses. Realising his peril, he switched on the ignition and pressed the starter. Fortunately, the engine fired and caught immediately. Simultaneously the crowd thronged around him. John engaged first gear and shot the vehicle forward. People scattered in all directions as the jeep careened down the sloping path leading away from the coolie-lines, while a howl of baffled rage and disappointment arose behind.

Raman Nair was overjoyed at what had happened. His luck had really been good. At the same time, he realised that, although over fifty persons were present, they represented but a portion of all the workers. He required reinforcements for the evil purpose he had in mind.

"Stop work and summon your brothers. We'll kill the white dogs and burn down their house this very day", he yelled.

Within the hour, a crowd of about three hundred persons had assembled. Leading this rabble, Raman Nair took the road to the Greystone bungalow.

Meanwhile John had returned with Chicka. He hurriedly explained the situation to Ruth, advising her to pack a few essentials quickly into her valise. Then he strode up and down the verandah nervously, trails of blue smoke billowing behind as he puffed vigorously at his pipe. What should he do next? Run away, with Ruth? Go back and try to reason with the workers? Or summon Ted Baker? Could the police do anything? They had their hands full at the moment and would not welcome him.

He was brought to a halt by the figure of the gardener running up the steps.

"What do you want, Veeran?" he asked testily.

"*Dorai* , as you know my younger brother works among the coolies. He has just arrived to say they have struck work and are coming here in force, led by some strange man, to murder you and the *doraisani* and set fire to the building. I fear for your life. Escape in the motor-car while there's yet time".

Simultaneously he heard somebody behind him, and turned to observe the bearer, some few paces away.

"*Sahib* ", Chandra spoke hurriedly in broken English, "master must go at once—*ek dum* —to save life. Big mob coming now to fire house and kill master. Listen Chandra's word. I like master; therefore, no tell lie".

Unknown to all of them, Ruth had come to the doorway leading to the verandah and was listening. She had not understood what the gardener had said in Tamil, but grasped Chandra's warning.

"So John, your beloved coolies are not to be trusted after all, eh? Fancy a servant suggesting we should run away from our own home! If I were only a man and could use a gun, I would shoot some of these black swine and be done with it".

Chandra glanced at her, hatred flashing in his eyes. He spoke, "*Mem-sahib* must remember. Perhaps can shoot few only. But plenty more left, and they will kill all white men and women in country. For you, *Sahib* ", he continued, turning to John, "Chandra have great liking. I say now, go before too late! For rest of white people", and here he turned pointedly to Ruth, "Chandra wish he see all dead!"

Abruptly he turned his back upon them and disappeared into the house without another word. The next few moments passed in silence. Then they heard the distant roar of an approaching throng.

"The coolies are coming", John said hurriedly, "I think I can pacify and reason with them, but you had better get away in the jeep as fast as possible. Take the road to Nilambur. Ted will be able to do something. I shall get in touch with you again as soon as I can".

Ruth went to the jeep, John accompanying her. She knew how to drive a car but had not done so since coming out to India. Moreover, this vehicle had a left-hand drive and she was not sure whether she would be able to manage it. She started the motor, put the gear in first position after John had shown her, and released the clutch.

Jerkily, and weaving from side to side, the jeep climbed the gradient leading to the Nilambur road as the forerunners of the throng of coolies burst from the pathway that came from the coolie-lines.

Howling frantically, they streamed towards the bungalow where John Greystone awaited them on the top step of the verandah, hands in trouser pockets, his pipe clenched between his teeth, emitting a blue haze of tobacco smoke.

Chapter 15
In the Clutches of the Enemy

June spent a restless night wooing slumber that would not come. She was worried. What would her father say if he knew what she had overheard? What would he say to her for not awakening him? What would he think about her secret thoughts?

A hundred such questions raced through her mind, nor could she find the answers as she turned and twisted under the smothering heat of the mosquito net. At last she fell into a troubled sleep and was awakened by the sounds of her father moving about in the dining room. She could hear him pumping the primus stove to make the hot water for their morning coffee. June got out of bed and hurried to assist him.

"I'm sorry I overslept, Dad", she began by way of apology, "it was very hot last night and I was restless until the early hours of morning".

"That's okay, Junie", her father replied kindly, "surely I can make the coffee once in a while. The heat didn't worry me and I slept soundly enough, although I thought I heard a car passing sometime during the night. Did you?"

June hesitated a moment, then replied evasively, "No…no Dad, I didn't hear anything. Perhaps you dreamt it".

"Perhaps", rejoined old Gardner with a chuckle, "but I doubt it. Not such a dream, anyhow".

After breakfast was over, June asked her father if he was using Tony that morning, and when he replied that he had some paper work to attend to, she said she wanted to go for a ride.

"I know how you feel about it, Dad", she added, "and I shall be very careful".

Dressed in her usual fashion in khaki shirt and breeches, and carrying her rifle, June mounted Tony and allowed him to amble down the road leading in the opposite direction to where she had had her adventure with the tiger.

It was sometime later that she became aware of her

immediate surroundings. Tony was sauntering along the road unconcernedly, while the jungle enveloped them on both sides. The track went in an easterly direction and she had never been that way before.

Suddenly she noticed the tyre marks of a motor car on the ground below. June wondered if it was the same car whose occupants she had heard speaking the previous night. It must be. On an impulse, she decided to follow to find out where the car had gone.

Tony proceeded another mile when they negotiated a turn and the path entered a small clearing in the forest. June observed a dilapidated touring car standing to a side, partially concealed by bushes. Reining Tony in she considered what to do next.

She was by no means afraid and curiosity impelled her to find out something more. She allowed Tony to approach the car. It was deserted, nor could she see or hear anybody in the vicinity. June dismounted, tied Tony to a tree, and walked up to the car. She noticed it bore a Calicut number plate.

It appeared strange that a car should be left unattended in the jungle. Surely the driver must be somewhere. With this idea in mind she crossed the clearing and continued to walk along the footpath for a short distance on the other side.

Within a few paces she came to a banyan tree and was surprised to see two small, conical tents pitched beneath it. Not thinking of any danger, June approached them. She could hear the murmur of voices and came yet closer, hoping she would be able to make out what was being said.

Just then the figure of an Indian, clothed in a shirt overhanging a white dhoti, stepped outside. The man caught sight of her and stared in astonishment. For some reason, his expression struck her as being incongruously funny and she giggled in amusement.

In Malayalam he called aloud, obviously to some other person in the tent, "Come quickly, Chacko. We appear to have a visitor".

Immediately another Indian joined him. A lean individual—with sharp features and sharper eyes: He never hesitated for a

moment, but strode towards June and grasped her firmly by the wrist with one hand. With the other he wrenched the rifle off her shoulder and swung it on to his own. Before she realised what was happening, June found herself being dragged into the smaller of the two tents.

"So; you're a spy?" hissed this second individual, "and have been listening to us. That's unfortunate indeed, for now we will kill you". The man spoke perfect English and his eyes glowered at her.

For some unaccountable reason, June was not afraid. She wondered what she should do. Last night she had almost decided to throw in her lot with these patriots. But now she was not quite so sure. Could she consider these men as her friends—as her own countrymen?

"I'm not a spy", June denied indignantly, "I came for a ride and happened to turn down this track. Seeing a deserted car, I was wondering whose it could be when I noticed your tents and came to investigate".

"Who are you?" Chacko asked irritably, "it's strange for one of your kind to wander about alone in a jungle".

"My name is June Gardner. I'm the daughter of the Range Officer who lives at the forest quarters".

"So!" Chacko again said the one word softly, but there was doubt and suspicion in his voice, while his face assumed a leering expression.

"So what?" June asked defiantly. "As a matter of fact, I heard you speaking to the Forest Guards last night".

Chacko seized her roughly by the shoulder. His hand trembled, "And I suppose you told your father about it?"

"You are wrong there. I did nothing of the kind, because… because…" June stopped speaking abruptly. She did not know how to express her feelings to this stranger.

"Because of what?" queried both men together.

She hesitated for a few seconds and then made up her mind to tell them. But before doing so, June decided to assert herself. She objected to being cross-questioner in this rude fashion. Above all, she resented being man-handled and pushed around.

"If you're gentlemen, you will offer a lady a seat and not keep me standing while you interrogate me. When you know how to behave, I shall explain my reason for not telling my father about your visit".

"I see. So you have become a lady?" There was a wealth of contempt in Chacko's voice. "When did that miracle occur?"

The blood rose to June's face as she realised the meaning of his words. The man had spoken plainly. He had deliberately intended to insult her. This Indian was saying, in other words, the same thing that Ruth Greystone had said just one day earlier. He was asking how she, June Gardner, a Eurasian and a half-breed, had suddenly become a lady to dare to call herself one.

Tears moistened her eyes as the thought soaked in.

"Damn you, you black swine!" The words tumbled from June's mouth in a rush as she shook her shoulder free from the man's grasp.

Chacko glared at her, too thunderstruck for words. Tiny beads of perspiration formed at his temples under the emotion of suppressed fury.

Then he slapped her. Once, twice and thrice. Hard.

The force of the blows sent June stumbling against the canvas wall of the tent. She covered her face with her hands and began to cry bitterly.

Chapter 16
The Escape

"You half-caste bitch!"

Chacko towered over the cringing girl.

"You dare to call me a black swine! I've a mind to kill you". And with the words he dealt June another vicious blow across the side of her face with his closed fist.

With a low, shuddering moan she lapsed into unconsciousness. The second man had been a silent witness to the scene, nor had he attempted to restrain his infuriated companion.

When the girl fainted, he asked, "What are we going to do with her? We dare not release her. If we do, she'll go back to her father and inform him. In a short while we'll have the police here. Why don't you complete the job and kill her?"

Chacko did not answer immediately. He was still glaring at June, while his chest rose and fell with the violence of his emotions.

He was thinking rapidly. Indeed Papachen—for that was his companion's name—had spoken wisely. He dared not release this slut.

"You're right", he conceded, "The D.S.P. will come himself. We'll be forced to flee".

That was something they could not afford to do at this juncture. They were there with the specific purpose of carrying cut the secret plans made by the headquarters of the Party.

It would be easy enough to kill her and dispose of the body. Chacko smiled to himself as he thought of the man-eater. That would afford a wonderful opportunity to anyone to get rid of an enemy. Too diligent a search would not be made for the missing person.

Or he could choke her to death! He would suffocate her with his pillow as she lay unconscious. Just put the pillow over her mouth and sit upon it. She shouldn't take a long time to die then. He might even strangle her.

He could imagine his fingers sinking into her soft flesh as he

squeezed and squeezed and squeezed her throat, cutting off the supply of air and forcing her to die slowly. That would make him feel nice in many ways.

Literally he, Chacko, would hold this girl's life in his bare hands. There would be no mercy for her. He would squeeze and squeeze and squeeze. How her soft flesh would shrink and melt under his grasp! Soft flesh!...soft flesh!

Chacko looked down upon the figure of the recumbent girl lying at his feet. How inviting and tempting she looked! Her body was half-twisted around, the lower portion sprawled on its side. Her riding-breeches, encasing calves and thighs so tightly, accentuated the bulge of her hips and posterior, the legs stretched widely apart. At the waist the girl's body had turned so that the upper half lay on its back. This made her figure show admirably. When he dragged her inside the tent, her shirt had become unbuttoned at the neck. Later, as he gripped her, the next button had broken off. The girl was wearing no bodice. A pair of brassieres were partly visible, and Chacko's deep breaths of rage turned into the shorter, quicker breathing of lust as his eyes gazed upon the twin firm mounds so helplessly exposed. He saw and felt in imagination the touch of the tender flesh beneath.

June's hat had fallen off when Chacko had struck her. The hair she always wore loose down her back lay spread in abandoned disorder around her head, its deep rich blackness blending pleasantly with the chocolate-brown complexion of her delicate skin. She looked beautiful and very enticing.

How he would love to undress her! Yes, strip her naked and enjoy this lovely body that was his for the mere taking. Absolutely and entirely his and quite unable to resist him.

If only he was alone and this meddlesome companion, Papachen, was not there. As if to accentuate his unwelcome presence, Papachen addressed him again.

"Well, what are we going to do with her? You haven't answered the question".

A film of lust had come over Chacko's eyes, but he realised in time that it would never do to show such weakness to another member of the Party. Particularly this man. He would tell the others

what had happened and how the great Chacko had behaved. Where would his reputation be?

Chacko thought rapidly.

He would keep this girl a prisoner. Later that day; —no, it could not be during the day as they were in hiding; it would have to be that night—he would send Papachen in the car on some mission or the other. That would give him sufficient time in which to have the girl.

"We shall bind and keep her a prisoner in one of the tents till a more opportune time comes to get rid of her", he said.

"Why not do it now?" asked Papachen bluntly.

Chacko swung round to face the speaker, his eyes blazing with frustrated desire. For a moment, he felt like telling this troublesome fellow to mind his own business.

But Chacko held himself in check. On no account, should he betray his feelings by giving away to temper and arousing the suspicions of his companion. Far better would it be to play a patient game and answer mildly. He would have his opportunity as soon as he could make an excuse to send Papachen away.

So, he said in a matter of fact tone, "It'll be dangerous to kill her now. If we do that we will have to get away from here at once and we're certain to be observed in the car in broad daylight. As you know, the police are after us and our descriptions have been widely circulated. Some busybody will recognize us or the car and inform them. Who knows, we might even be caught. It's altogether too risky".

Papachen was forced to agree with this undoubtedly logical argument, although his astute mind and powers of observation had noticed the varying expressions on Chacko's face as he had been looking at the girl and had guessed what caused them. He made no rejoinder but went to the other tent and returned with three pieces of stout cord.

They turned the girl over on her stomach and tied her wrists behind and then bound her feet together. Bending her legs back at the knees, with the third piece of cord they connected her two ankles with the cord that bound her wrists together, so that she was bent like a bow. June was just beginning to show signs of returning

consciousness as Chacko forced a cotton handkerchief into her mouth as a gag, and knotted it at the back of her head.

They gave a final glance to see if her bonds were secure and then both men went out and walked towards the larger tent.

Although June did not know it, the tent in which she was a captive belonged to the driver of the car. The previous night the conspirators had dropped him near the Forest Guards' quarters where he was to contact one of them, a Malayali named Kunji Nair, who was already a subordinate member of the Party. This man was to play an important part in events to come. The driver would not return for the next two or three days.

At first, she was filled with terror and tried to call out, but the gag effectively prevented that. She blamed herself bitterly for her foolhardy curiosity. Finally, womanlike, she cried again as she thought of the words of insult that had been flung at her and the blows she had received. How anxious her father would become when she did not return. He would think that she and Tony had been killed by the man-eater. And what had become of Tony, she wondered.

But these thoughts were only transient. June was a brave girl and soon forced herself to face facts and cease recriminating. She had fallen into the hands of desperadoes, and from the nature of the conversation she had overheard the previous night, they were unscrupulous characters who would stop at nothing. Undoubtedly these two individuals were the men who had caused the riot at Ooparpet.

June felt she was extremely lucky to be alive. She knew they could easily have killed her. The fact that she had been made a prisoner all too obviously indicated that they had some purpose in which pity played no part whatever.

Then she realised the fate that lay in store. After that, she knew she would assuredly be murdered. Instead of giving away to futile regrets June determined to concentrate upon finding a way to escape.

The muscles of her thighs began to ache due to the uncomfortable position in which she was lying. So did her shoulders. Fortunately, the two rebels had not tied her to anything

nor was she blindfolded. That enabled her to roll from one end of the tent to the other. And she could see.

Desperately, June began to search her surroundings with her eyes for some means of freeing herself; something she could use to sever her bonds. The little tent possessed no furniture beyond the canvas camp-cot in the center. Because of the smallness of the structure, she lay right up against this cot. Under it her eyes came to rest upon a leather suitcase. It had been loosely stuffed with clothes by the owner and the cover of the suitcase lay open upon the things that were inside.

As June looked, she noticed a little green tin box in a corner of this suitcase. Her mind began to work like lightning.

Could that little box contain a safety-razor? It certainly resembled the one her father had. And if the box contained such a safety-razor, were there any blades with it?

June wriggled across so that her head went beneath the cot near the corner of the suitcase. The gag prevented her using her teeth, but she rested on her right shoulder and then craned her neck upwards and forwards till her nose touched the tin box. With a quick jerk downwards, she tipped it out and the box fell soundlessly upon the grassy floor. Gripping it firmly between her chin and neck, she wriggled backwards from under the bed.

June released the box and eased herself higher up the floor till it was in line with her navel. She then lay on her back and slid herself sideways till she felt the box beneath her. In a few moments, she could grasp it between her fingers. Raising her weight on to her shoulder-blades, June began to work feverishly.

The box opened easily enough, and within she could feel a safety-razor. Then her exploring fingers found a number of blades enclosed within their paper covers, wedged in a little niche formed for them in the box itself.

It did not take a moment to lever out one of the blades with her finger nails, and after a little fumbling she was able to remove the sliver of steel from its paper envelope. Now came the difficult part of the operation. June found that by holding the blade at its extreme end between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand she could just manage to reach one of the cords that bound her

wrists.

She knew she would have to work fast, as the men might return at any moment. She was lying on the box containing the safety razor, but if they discovered what she was doing they would surely kill her. Exerting what pressure she could upon the blade, the girl commenced to move its edge against the cord, sawing up and down.

A few times she winced with pain as she cut her wrist and felt the moisture of blood cover her fingers and the blade. That made it slippery. This caused the blade to fall from her grasp once and precious seconds were lost groping for it amongst the stems of grass growing on the ground. She found it at last and recommenced the sawing.

Suddenly she felt the cord give. But her wrists were not free yet and June started all over again, cutting at the next cord.

Then she heard the sound of voices from the next tent. Chacko was speaking in Malayalam and June could understand every word he said. She had learned the language during the three years her father had been stationed at Chedleth.

"I wonder if that fool Raman Nair will succeed in inciting the estate coolies to kill the Englishman and his wife today".

"Whoever chose him selected a wrong type of man", Papachen commented. "The fellow seems a craven at heart and has no push".

"Well", came the answer, accompanied by a loud chuckle that June could distinctly hear, "we can't expect everybody to be like you and me, my friend. If they were, there would not be one white man left alive in the country".

June felt the second cord part. After a few moments of manipulation, she realised one of her wrists was free. Now she was less hampered, and seizing the blade more firmly she cut through the cord that still held the other wrist to her feet. There came a sensation of great physical relief when she severed it at last and was able to straighten her legs that had been bent backwards all this while.

June sat up and began feverishly to slash at the remaining bonds that held her feet together. In a few moments, she was

completely free. She clambered to her feet almost to fall again. A couple of minutes were wasted till the circulation of blood was restored. At last she was able to walk.

The drone of conversation still came from the next tent. On tip-toe she crossed the floor and peeped through the flap. There, nearly a hundred yards away, was the car, and close to it her beloved Tony just where she had left him.

An appalling thought came to her now. Even if she succeeded in reaching Tony and riding away on him the men would hear her. They would undoubtedly give chase in the car. What chance would poor old Tony have?

Then June noticed her .3006 propped against the corner of the tent where Chacko had forgetfully left it. Her eyes lit up with pleasure. Now she would have something to defend herself with should the men try to recapture her.

Picking up her rifle and hat, June left the tent. Once outside she ran towards Tony.

She reached him and looked back anxiously. Thank God her escape had not been noticed. There were no signs of pursuit. If she started riding immediately, June realised the horse's hoof-beats would be heard. So she led him away for some fifty yards till the track turned to the left and the tents were out of sight.

She mounted then and rising in the stirrups bent forward to whisper into the animal's ear, "Now Tony, gallop as fast as you can. Please". At the same time, she gave the reins a gentle jerk and jabbed her heels into the horse's flanks.

As if he understood what was required of him, Tony responded. In due course, they passed the turning that led to her father's quarters nor did she hesitate or slow down. June knew where she was heading, but would not have been able to give a satisfactory reason had she been asked. On she galloped to warn the Englishman of the impending danger that threatened him.

Chapter 17
A Life and Death Gamble

The howling mob came to a halt before the steps of the Greystone bungalow and gazed at the lone figure of its owner, leaning with folded arms against a pillar of the verandah, placidly smoking his pipe

They had expected the planter to flee in terror. Many had anticipated that he would fall on his knees and plead for his life. A few had foreseen some sort of resistance, and they had taken care to keep to the rear. They knew the white man had firearms But none had expected Greystone to behave as if nothing in the world was wrong.

The murmur of a hundred voices died to a few whispers. Then there was complete silence. One could have heard a pin drop.

Raman Nair had headed them and was the first to burst into view on the drive leading to the bungalow. But he was also one of those who had expected the planter to resist. Thus he had contrived, as if by accident, to fall back and stood somewhere in the midst of the throng.

Now seeing that Greystone was unarmed, he pushed through the mass and ran up the steps leading to the verandah.

"We've come to kill you, English dog. You have oppressed your workers long enough and sucked their lifeblood. You've kept them in poverty while you have reveled in this mansion of riches. Those days are over now. You are powerless before us. We'll kill every one of you English people. The gutters will run red with your blood."

Raman Nair stopped to gasp for breath. Flecks of foam-like saliva at the corners of his mouth evinced the vehemence of his speech.

"Who is this man who says these things? Greystone knew how critical the moment was. The slightest mistake, the flicker of an eyelid portraying fear the smallest action indicating indecision, would bring about his immediate death at the hands of this hysterical mob. So he did not move beyond taking the pipe from his mouth.

Nobody answered, while John's calm manner drove the Malayali to still greater fury.

"Who am I?" he screamed, "Why, I'll tell you. I'm a true son of India and I'm here to free my motherland from the shackles in which she has been bound for the last two hundred years by you accursed Britishers".

Greystone could hear the rumble of approval from the crowd of coolies. His position was extremely precarious. Still leaning nonchalantly against the pillar, John lowered his pipe, emptied the bowl against the heel, of his boot, and methodically refilled it. He struck a match, and as the light floated above the tobacco inhaled deeply, emitting clouds of smoke while the contents caught fire.

Then he spoke again. "Will somebody step forward and say in what way I have oppressed or harmed him". The coolies glanced at each other. Those in the rear stood on tip-toe to peer over the heads of the others, expecting a volunteer from the front ranks to speak. People at the front turned their heads around to listen to someone from the back.

But nobody said anything.

Raman Nair started to shout again, "We have come to…"

"Shut up!" interrupted Greystone, "I'm addressing my workers, and not you. When I want you to speak, I shall ask you".

The effect of his words was like the lash of a whip.

Raman Nair was stunned.

Before the Malayali could recover himself, Greystone addressed the coolies for the second time. "So; not one has come forward! Doesn't that show I have not oppressed any of you as this liar is saying?" Then he went on to speak to the gathering. "Now, will someone I have helped in the past, please say so".

Again, there was the flutter of whispering, the turning of heads and the craning of necks. After some delay, an individual from the back called out, "You helped me when my son was very sick. You took him, my wife and myself to Nilambur in your jeep and put him into the hospital there…and you paid all the charges".

Hearing these words, Raman Nair fairly danced with rage. "Fool!" he screamed, "Cannot you see that he is misleading you?

Cannot you see he is only saying these things to save himself from being killed? Come, let us be done with this talk. Let's do away with the swine".

Suiting the action to his words, he rushed up to Greystone in a threatening manner. But the Malayali was also cunning. He had intended to take no active part in the murder, and so had come unarmed. Should any trouble arise later, he would be able to prove that somebody else had committed the crime.

The man who had just been rebuked now spoke for the second time. "Who're you to call me a fool?" he asked. "If it wasn't for the *dorai* 's help my child would not be alive today. Therefore, I say that he and his wife should not be killed".

With these words, he turned and walked away. Both Raman Nair and Greystone realized what was happening, and that whichever of them could hold sway over the feelings of the crowd that morning would win the day.

There was just the one difference in Greystone's case. The stakes were high; the highest possible! If he failed, his life would pay the forfeit.

Raman Nair changed his tactics. "Even if none of you are bold enough to openly admit how this white man has harassed you, you should remember that while you slave for a mere pittance, you are killed by snakes and eaten by tigers. The compensation paid to your families, if it is given at all, is but a few rupees to the wealth he is amassing".

It was a clever piece of psychology. Very deftly and subtly Raman Nair had switched the line of attack to another angle and there was precious little time for planning a defense. The crowd again became restless. A good many people called out, "Yes, what about that? He's quite right. You don't care what happens to us".

John Greystone thought very fast. Then he made the greatest gamble of his lifetime. He held up his hand for silence, and strangely enough the jabbering ceased. "Workers", he began, addressing the throng in Tamil, "For once this stranger has spoken wisely. It is not proper that you should be exposed to danger from the man-eater while working for me.

"You know I made an attempt to shoot this beast, while this

fellow did nothing. Instead of just talking, let him select whichever of my guns he wants and help me to shoot it. That plan would be a practical one."

"On my part, until it has been killed, I will no longer spend time in supervising your work. I leave that to your sense of duty.

"On his part, he should not spend time making more trouble against me."

All the time John was speaking, a hush had fallen upon the assembly. It was easy to observe from the expression on their faces that the coolies were divided in their opinions. John had made a good psychological gamble and for the moment the danger to his life had passed.

Somebody at the back called, "What say you, O stranger? Are you prepared to accept the *dorai* 's challenge?"

Another voice shouted, "It seems fair enough. Choose your weapon and try to kill the tiger for us". But a third man suggested, "Perhaps it's only a trick.

The *dorai* will shoot us if we let him bring out his firearms".

Raman Nair's eyes blazed. He saw the leadership he had struggled so hard to gain over this ignorant rabble slipping from his grasp and determined to take advantage of the doubt raised by the last speaker. "Brothers, this is but a pretext", he cried. "The white man wants the opportunity to go inside and get his guns. If you allow him to do that, he will show his true colors by shooting all of us".

The mob had been so intent upon watching John, and he in answering them, that nobody heard the pounding of a horse's hooves nor observed the lone rider, till June was pressing Tony through the throng and finally dismounted at the foot of the verandah steps. Then everyone's eyes turned upon her. John became aware that before him was the girl who had recently told him off in no uncertain terms.

"Why, Miss Gardner", he gasped in surprise, "what on earth brings you here and at a moment like this? Go away while you can."

June replied simply, "There's no time for details. I heard of

the plan to attack you and came to warn you. I see I'm too late".

John was just able to say, "For God's sake get out of here", and to see June shake her head resolutely, when Raman Nair continued to harangue the mob.

"It's a trick", he repeated, "don't allow him to go inside and fetch his guns".

Again, the coolies looked at John accusingly.

Someone shouted, "If that's so, let's kill him".

An instant later, the diminutive figure of Chicka stood beside his master. Turning to Raman Nair, the jungle-man pointed a gnarled forefinger and said, "Oh father of liars!" You dare to accuse the *dorai* of such intentions! Very well, that's easily settled. Let him stand aside. I'll bring the weapons out. This is, if you have the guts to accept the challenge".

Raman Nair lost his temper altogether. "Offspring of a monkey! Keep your nose out of this or I shall kick you".

"Don't try", countered little Chicka, "you're now standing on your feet. When I finish with you, you'll have to crawl on your stumps".

There was a titter of laughter at the little Karumba's audacity in speaking in this manner.

Another voice shouted "Have done with this stupid wrangling. We will allow neither of you to fetch the guns. Let the servant bring them out".

"I agree to that", said John quickly, and turning around called to Chandra who had been standing at the doorway,

"Please fetch both my rifles and shotgun".

While he waited, John knocked out the ashes from his pipe again and reloaded it for the second time. He struck a match leisurely and started puffing to ignite the fresh charge.

June had not spoken after explaining her arrival. She looked up wonderingly at the lone Englishman who conducted himself thus complacently against such odds, and with his life in so great danger.

In a short while Chandra returned with a rifle slung across

his shoulder, and the other weapons in each hand.

Before he could approach, John pointed to the further end of the verandah and said, "Take them over there".

Again, he addressed the crowd before him. "This man has made you suspicious of me. Do you realise that when I heard you approaching I had plenty of time to get these firearms and use them against you?

"I didn't do that because you are my own workers. I know you are good people. This agitator has excited you with his lies and I don't blame you for what's happened. "Let him go ahead now and choose the weapon he wants".

All eyes turned to Raman Nair.

"But where am I going to find the tiger?" he asked in an injured tone.

"Where indeed?" That's your problem. You have to look for him. It shouldn't be difficult". The Karumba's sarcasm evoked further mirth among the coolies.

The planter now took a hand in matters.

"Listen chaps", he said, "he now says he doesn't know where to find the tiger. Fair enough. I'll even find it for him. Is that okay?"

"That's quite fair, *dorai* ", said a man in the front rank. There was a general murmur of approval.

"And in the meanwhile, remember what I said. You must make me two promises. The first, that you'll not allow this fellow to make any more trouble till we kill the tiger. The second, that you will do your work in my absence".

"We promise, *dorai* ", answered a number of voices.

"Thank you. And don't forget; when I do find the tiger, you must see that this fellow helps me to do the shooting", John reminded them, banteringly.

"Definitely", said several of the men.

"But how do I know you will not give me the worst weapon when the time comes?" cried Raman Nair, complainingly.

"Select whichever you want now", invited John, "along with

twenty cartridges. I have a .470 rifle. That is the most powerful of the lot. Next comes a .450\400 rifle. And there is my .12 bore shotgun. They all are double-barelled weapons. Make your choice".

The Malayali replied sulkily, "I shall require the most powerful rifle—the .470".

"By all means use it", agreed John.

A few minutes after that there was not a coolie to be seen. Nor Raman Nair. The crowd had melted away as quickly as it had come.

John turned to June and said earnestly, "Thank you very much for coming here at such great risk to warn me. It was very brave of you. Why did you do it? How did you come to hear about the trouble?"

June's brown-tanned face flushed as she heard him. She evaded his first question but related about her capture and escape from Chacko and Papachen.

John's eyes opened widely in sheer amazement,

"You're indeed a brave girl", he remarked.

There was silence between them for some minutes after that.

Then Greystone said, "Please come inside and have some tea. Or a drink, if you prefer. You deserve it after the ordeal you've been through. You must be parched. "Ruth will probably return with the police. Then I'll take you home. It's not safe to ride back alone. Those two scoundrels may intercept you in the car. This time they'll kill you in order to ensure your silence".

As if in a dream, June felt herself nodding agreement to his plan.

Chapter 18
Ted Comes to the Rescue

As Ruth got the feel of the jeep, her foot came down harder on the accelerator and within seventy five minutes of leaving John she had reached the outskirts of Nilambur and was at the D.S.P's office.

"Hello Ruth. I'm glad to see you", Ted Baker greeted amiably. "Do sit down".

Excitedly she said, "The coolies have attacked our bungalow. John just had time to send me to tell you. I don't know if they have killed him by now".

Ted wasted no time in words. Advancing to the end of the verandah, he called the Inspector.

"Detail a dozen of the Armed Reserve to follow me in the Black Maria. Mr. Greystone's coolies have attacked him. You come along with us in the jeep. Hurry!" he urged.

Then he returned to his office to don his belt, revolver and helmet. A few minutes later Ted led the way in the jeep with the Black Maria close behind. Having used one of these vehicles during the war he was familiar with them and drove fast. Within the hour they reached the last stretch of roadway that led to the portico of John's bungalow. Everything appeared peaceful. Not a soul was to be seen.

Were they too late? Ted groaned inwardly at the thought. Abruptly, he came to a halt, the Black Maria squealing loudly as its driver braked a few yards behind.

Two people came out of the inner room, crossed the verandah, and walked down the steps to meet them. They were John Greystone and an Anglo-Indian girl dressed in khaki riding-habit, swinging a broad-brimmed hat by its chin-strap.

The D.S.P. vaulted out and approached John quickly.

"Thank God you're safe", he greeted. "What happened?"

John smiled wryly as he looked at the police officer and then at the Black Maria. "It was good of you to have come so promptly.

Thanks ever so much. The coolies, turned out with the intention of killing Ruth and me, but I managed to talk them over and we parted on a very good understanding".

"A very good understanding! Whatever do you mean, John?" Ruth asked the question incredulously.

Her husband smiled more broadly. Then he suddenly remembered he had not introduced June to the Superintendent. "My apologies", he exclaimed, "meet Miss Gardner. She's the daughter of the new Forest Range Officer". Turning to June, he explained, "This is Mr. Edward Baker, the D.S.P. He's also a newcomer to the district".

Ted bent forward with hand outstretched and June grasped it. Then John related the adventure she had been through just as she had told it to him.

"The very men we're searching for!" exclaimed the police officer.

He called the Inspector and both of them listened to June's description of Chacko and Papachen, and her directions as to how to reach their encampment.

"Go after them quickly, Ramchandra Rao", he ordered, "I'll stay here till you return". The Inspector hurried back to the Black Maria and the armed party drove hastily away.

To get back to what they had been talking about, Baker asked, "I'm decidedly curious to know what kind of understanding you arrived at with the coolies".

"They're good fellows", explained John, "but were misled and brought to a fever-pitch of excitement by that strange man I told you about the other day". Continuing, he explained what had transpired, concluding with the bargain he had made with his workers.

"Good gracious! Do you seriously believe they'll keep their promise?"

"Not only am I certain they will", said John without hesitation, "but when the tiger is located, they'll make the stranger join me in shooting it".

"Where's this agitator now?" Ted asked.

"He's at the coolie-lines".

"Then I'm going there to arrest him", Ted asserted, turning towards the jeep.

"Oh no, you're not!" cut in John, "I will not testify against him".

Ted and Ruth stared in amazement.

"What do you mean?" the D.S.P. queried.

John explained. "Listen Ted. Look at it this way. It's a matter of my word of honour to the coolies. If you arrest him at this juncture, they'll think I was insincere and that it was all part of a plan and will never trust me again. Understand?"

Ruth snapped sharply, "What do we care what they think".

"But I care; and a mighty lot. I believe in keeping my promises", John reminded her.

"And how are you going to find the man-eater?" Ted asked.

For answer, Greystone turned about and called loudly, "Chicka!"

Soon the little man stood before him. He continued. "This man is a Karumba—an aborigine. I took him into my service to help to track the tiger. These chaps are experts in jungle lore".

Ted did not answer but gazed at Chicka moodily.

Then he said, "I don't think you're being wise. Suppose that trouble-maker incites the coolies afresh and they come back and murder you and Ruth? I think I'd better leave some policemen here for a few days to protect you".

"Thanks ever so much", John responded, "I'm most grateful but it won't be necessary or advisable".

"Why not?" asked the D.S.P. irritably. It was clear he was annoyed.

"The coolies will think I don't trust them", explained John.

"You're being perfectly stupid", Ruth interjected, "I agree with Ted. That leader should be taught a lesson. What about the danger I run by staying here with you?"

"I feel Mr. Greystone is right", broke in June. "Remember, he

was entirely at their mercy. They could have killed him. But they didn't. Instead, they fell in with his terms and naturally Mr. Greystone wants to keep his bargain".

"What a ridiculous idea!" commented Ruth, rudely.

The sun had gone down and the short tropical twilight was already setting in. There was a strained silence after that, but Ruth and the Superintendent did not argue the matter any further.

Catching Ted's eye, Greystone asked, "Would you mind staying with Ruth for an hour, led, till I drive Miss Gardner home?"

And turning to June, he added, "Leave Tony here for the night. I'll have him brought to your quarters tomorrow. Your father must be mighty anxious about your whereabouts. You left home sometime this morning, didn't you?"

June agreed. "Yes; Dad will be worried to death. He'll think I've been killed by the tiger". In the excitement of all that had happened, she had quite forgotten about her father.

John started the jeep and June got in next to him.

She called, "Goodnight, Mrs. Greystone! Goodnight, Mr. Baker!"

Ted replied, "Goodnight, Miss Gardner!" Ruth did not answer.

The jeep turned to the right off the main road a little later, along the track through the coffee bushes and past the stream where the tiger had killed the sambar.

"I must thank you again, Miss Gardner, for risking your life to warn me".

To this remark, June gave no response, but after some minutes asked John a surprising question.

"Why does your wife not like me, Mr. Greystone?"

The planter attempted an explanation.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that", he countered, "Ruth is just upset about all these things happening one after the other. Besides, this solitude is beginning to get her down. She's accustomed to city life in England".

"Or is it because I am dark?" went on June, inexorably.

Greystone heard the tremor in her voice and recognised he was on a delicate subject. He attempted to pass it off lightly.

"Nonsense, whatever made you think of such a silly thing!"

But June was in the mood to thrash the subject out.

"It's not nonsense, Mr. Greystone", she replied softly but distinctly, "She practically said so the first time we met, remember?"

John observed she was suffering from a sense of hurt.

"I assure you that you're mistaken", he asserted. Then, "Come, let's talk of something else. Tell me more about yourself and your father. Do you really not feel lonely at times?"

"I love the jungle", June replied, "and would hate to live in a city."

Now it was Greystone's turn to be silent. He wished his wife felt the same way.

Slowly, he heard himself talking. "Miss Gardner, my father founded this estate. He carved it out of the forest. Dad lies buried beneath a large banyan tree a furlong from the bungalow. He loved that tree and used to spend the few leisure hours he could afford in the evening sitting under it in his old arm-chair, smoking or just dreaming. He made me promise to bury him there and I kept that promise. There were no restrictions in those days enforcing the dead to be buried in recognised cemeteries. Once a week I visit that big tree and his grave and think of old dad. He loved this estate; every inch of it.

"I was born here and have lived all my life on the plantation except for three visits that I made to England to see my mother who went back to her people. On the last occasion, I met Ruth and married her at Cowes. She said she would very much like to come out to India and I brought her. But now that she's here, she seems to hate it".

John lapsed into thought and the only sound to be heard was the hum of the engine and the whir of the wheels as the jeep lurched along the jungle track. Then he went on, "I don't understand why I'm telling you these things, Miss Gardner. I know I shouldn't bother you with my affairs. Please forgive me. But perhaps it's because you love the wilds, just as I do. It's nice to be able to speak

to someone who can understand".

June said nothing. As she listened to his story a great joy came into her mind and a warmth filled her heart. Here was a white man who was not ashamed to claim this country as his own.

It was dark inside the jeep as they travelled through the forest. The glare of the headlights served to accentuate the blackness within. John bent towards her as if to seek the consolation of her face.

June noticed him looking and turned her head aside.

Involuntarily he took his right hand off the steering wheel and found June's tiny left hand in the darkness. His large palm and fingers closed over her small one, and rested there. She did not attempt to disengage herself. June seemed to find difficulty in saying the words.

They came at last, "She is your wife. You must be loyal to her, Mr. Greystone. You must".

The jeep negotiated the next turn in the track and a twinkle of lights beckoned from afar. Among them was a brighter one that threw its beam in a wide arc into the gloom. She knew it was the petromax lantern hanging from the verandah-roof of her father's quarters.

Soon John brought the vehicle to a halt at their destination. Some four men, all dressed in khaki, were talking in the compound. One of them carried a double-barreled gun. He strode up to the jeep as June alighted and the rays of the petromax showed it was her father.

The Forest Ranger exclaimed, "Junie! Thank God you're back! Where have you been? I've been worried about you all day. We combed the jungle in search of you and noticed Tony's tracks leading away from here and then back again at the gallop. But as there were no signs of a tiger's pugmarks in pursuit, I didn't know what to make of it".

June laid her hand quickly on her father's forearm and said, "Come inside, Daddy; I'll tell you all about it".

Turning to John Greystone, she added, "Please come too, Mr. Greystone. I want you to talk to dad". When they entered the living-

room, June continued,

"Dad, this is Mr. Greystone, the owner of the neighboring coffee-estate".

Then she closed the front door and beckoned John to a chair and her father to another. She dragged a third for herself and placed it so that she could sit between them.

The old Range Officer had been watching her movements with some surprise. Particularly had he noticed her close the door. He could contain his curiosity no longer and asked, "Why all this mystery? What's happened?"

"Listen", she began. Starting with the mysterious, visit made by the two conspirators the night before. June told the whole story. "The point is", she concluded, "We must be prepared for an attack at any time".

"They will only succeed over my dead body" asserted the Ranger resolutely. "As long as my Paradox can speak, God help the man who tries".

John had not spoken while June was relating her adventures. Now he said, "The D.S.P. is at my bungalow, Mr. Gardner. If you like, when I get back I can ask him to help you".

Gardner looked grim. He closed his right fist and pounded it against his thigh. "Thank you, but please don't trouble him. As long as I am alive, let it not be said that Neville Gardner was incapable of protecting the Government's property".

John looked up into the old man's swarthy face. He felt very proud of June and her father. Both of them had shown of what sterling stuff they were made.

Shortly afterwards Greystone rose to his feet, wished them good night, and climbed into his jeep to return home.

Old Gardner's last words were, "Thank you so much for bringing my Junie back safely to me".

June smiled sweetly.

On his way, two faces kept appearing before John.

One was that of a dark girl; and the other the face of a white woman—his wife.

Soon after he got back, the Black Maria with the Inspector and armed policemen returned empty-handed. The conspirators had already fled.

Chapter 19
The Spring of Death

John was up early next morning. Dawn glowed, crimson and purple, above the distant line of forest-clad hill to the east and rosy-cheeked bulbuls, with their sharply pointe black crests, twittered in scores in the lantana hedge around the garden of the bungalow. High up in the sky thousands of feet above, raced long streaks of silver-white cloud like gossamer thread. They ranged from the south-west to the north-east and John was glad, for they were the harbingers of the anxiously-awaited monsoon.

Walking to the rear of the building, he knocked at the wooden door of one of the out-houses. Almost immediately the Karumba stepped outside. John addressed him in Tamil. "Be ready, Chicka, within half-an-hour you and I must leave for the jungle to try to find where the man-eater lives. I've been thinking it over. If we follow the bed of the Karadi Arr, we are likely to pick up his pug-marks, and if they are fresh we'll get an idea in which direction he moves generally. That may help to lead us to his hiding-place. Once we've found that, we can tie up a number of live-baits and hope for a kill. Then you shall erect a machan for me and I'll make another attempt to shoot him when he returns for a second meal".

But Chicka shook his head slowly from side to side. It was evident he was not impressed. "There are two things against your plan, *dorai* . In the first place; alone I can penetrate the thorns and undergrowth. With you, I'm hampered. Secondly, the devil-tiger may not respond as quickly to an animal bait as he would if he saw a human-being before him. For he's a man-eater. You must bear that in mind".

John looked at him sharply. "Do you mean that I should wait in the open for him to come?" he queried.

"No *dorai* ", the Karumba replied, "it's I who'll wait, while you shoot him from the machan".

"You're crazy!" exploded John, "I never heard of such a thing in my life! It's a hair-brained scheme! I could never forgive myself if anything happened to you.

"Even your plan of tracking him alone is foolhardy. If I'm

there, I can cover you. But if you're alone…" John left his sentence unfinished.

"The *dorai* must know I was born in the jungle. I'm as much at home in it as any tiger".

"Oh no, you're not", the planter contradicted. "While you're searching for tracks on the ground before you, he'll spring on you from behind. I won't tolerate such imbecile plans.

"I'm coming along with you and we shall together try to find the tracks of this animal. That is my final order".

John ate some buttered toast and washed it down with coffee, donned a khaki shirt and long pants, and; put on his rubber-soled shoes so as to make no sound as he walked. Telling Ruth where he was going, he slung the .470 rifle across his shoulder, and with some cartridges in his pocket, he and Chicka set out for the Karadi Arr.

Within the hour, they stood on the sandy bed of the stream. Just a ribbon of water, hardly a yard in width, meandered down the center or at times wound near one or other bank when its progress in midstream was obstructed by rocks, boulders or the trunks of decaying trees that had been carried down by the flood-water during last year's monsoon.

The sand was clean and fine-grained and showed the tracks of every living creature that had traversed the stream from one bank to the other, or had wandered down to drink. The hoof-marks of sambar, spotted-deer and jungle sheep crossed and re-crossed in all directions. There was the trail of a panther that had skulked along the edge two nights ago, undoubtedly in the hope of springing upon some animal while it was quenching its thirst.

John and Chicka moved as silently as phantoms, skirting the rivulet as it turned and twisted and wended its way along its sandy course. Suddenly the Karumba stopped and pointed to his right.

The pug-marks of a tiger were visible in the soft earth. They led from the bank to the east, where the animal had broken out of the dense jungle, diagonally across the stream, to the western side. But they could be clearly seen at the edge of the running water. There was no sludge or signs of muddiness where the tracks disappeared to the rivulet. On the firmer earth fallen leaves and

webs, built by minute spiders, filled the indentations. These clues indicated that the trail was an old one.

John and the Karumba continued walking. A short distance further they came upon another tiger-track, also some days old. This led in the opposite direction. In the next half-mile, they met more tiger pug-marks, but none had been made more recently than at least three days ago.

Between the tree-tops on the western bank of the stream could be seen the summit of a small hill. For about two-thirds of the distance up it was clothed in grass and scrub-jungle. The remaining one-third was boulder-strewn. Part of the hill-top facing towards the river fell away in an abrupt cliff, and from the stream-bed they could see, over the tree-tops and the boulders, a series of fur roughs and small crevices in the face of this cliff.

Chicka studied the summit for a full minute. Then he said to John, "A tiger lives in one of those caves, *dorai* . That much is certain. He crosses this stream to the jungle on the east bank in the evenings and returns at dawn. But whether it's the man-eater or not, who can tell?

"And these are all old tracks. Also, we are getting further away from the hill. Let's retrace our footsteps and walk in the opposite direction. The hill is closer to the river there. Perhaps we may find a recent trail".

They turned and walked back to the point where they had met the Karadi Arr and continued their search further up the course of the little river. Chicka proved to be correct, for within two furlongs they met fresh tiger tracks leading to the western bank. It was still slightly muddy at the spot where these pug-marks met the edge of the water in spite of the flow of the stream, nor were there any dried leaves or spiders' webs in the depressions made by the tiger's feet. The tiny blades of grass that had been trodden upon were still bent by the weight of the animal that had passed and had not yet had time to return to their normal positions.

Chicka halted and stooped down to peer closely at the trail. He said, "*Dorai* , the tiger crossed here within three to four hours ago. Also, it is a tigress and not a tiger. She's an adult animal, quite large for her sex."

John had been studying the pug-marks as they appeared clearly imprinted in the sand. He confirmed for himself that they had been made by a tigress by the fact that they were different from the bigger, more rounded impressions that would have been left by a male animal. He nodded his head mechanically while saying, "The question is, was this trail left by the man-eater or just some harmless tigress? So far, everyone claims the man-eater to be a tiger —a male!"

Chicka answered with cold logic, "The only way to find that out is to shoot this animal. If no people disappear after that, you've killed the man-eater. If another human being is taken, you have killed the wrong tiger".

John smiled at the little jungle-man's elementary but correct reasoning, and wished there was a quicker way. At that time, he could not know that his wish would be dramatically granted within the next 12 hours.

"It is wise to tie two live-baits on opposite sides of the hill where the scrub ends and the rocks begin", suggested Chicka. "You sit at this end and let the big wind-bag sit with the other bait on the further side. I'm of the opinion that the tigress is sure to return this way and give you the chance of a shot. But we must insist that that fellow sits with the other bait. If nothing else, he'll be frightened to death by dawn".

John appreciated the little man's point and heartily agreed. They left the Karadi Arr then and headed for the coolie-lines. It took nearly two hours to reach their destination. Almost the first person they saw was Raman Nair sitting on the raised platform at the base of the sacred peepul tree. He looked up and scowled surily as John and Chicka approached.

With no preliminaries, the planter said in Malayalam, "We have discovered the tiger's whereabouts and the time has come to shoot it. This night you and I shall sit up. You've selected the rifle I'm now carrying. You may choose your own bait and the place where you wish to sit. I am going to call the coolies and declare a half-holiday".

Raman Nair turned an ashy-grey. He began to protest volubly. "How do I not know it is some trick? Suppose the rifle doesn't go off? Suppose…"

But John was not listening. He beckoned to the maistry who was standing at the doorway of his hut and directed the man to blow the long, curved brass horn that would summon the workers from all corners of the estate.

The horn was blown three times, making a long drawn-out mournful groan as of some leviathan in distress. In a short while the coolies began to arrive and in less than an hour they were all present.

Speaking in Tamil, John told them that Chicka and he had discovered that a tigress lived among the caves in the cliff near the top of the hillock to the west of the Karadi Arr.

They had no means of knowing whether this animal was the man-eater, but they would take no chances and the tigress must be killed. So he had assembled them to disclose that this very night he, and the Malayali Raman Nair, according to the agreement that had been made, should both wait for it with live baits on opposite sides of the hill.

There was a loud chorus of approval at this stage from the coolies, but it was interrupted by Raman Nair who started objecting vehemently. "How do I not know this is some plan of the white man's?" he repeated. "The rifle may not go off when I press the trigger".

John broke in relentlessly. "He may pick afresh and take any weapon he likes, and as I said he's also free to choose his own bait and arrange his machan to sit at any spot he wishes".

The coolies began to support their employer strongly. A loud voice called, "Come; play the game. The *dorai* is willing to keep his part of the bargain and you must keep yours".

"How do I know there won't be foul play?" wailed Raman.

"We shall see to that", they chorused, "We'll come along and set up your machan, as well as his".

"Suppose the rifle doesn't go off?" he ventured again.

"Fire a shot and try the rifle right now and keep it with you", John suggested. "I shall give you eleven rounds which you may also keep".

The rifle and the eleven rounds were thrust into Raman

Nair's hands and someone placed a broken water-pot in the crotch of a tree about fifty paces away.

"Come, O Malayali; try out the rifle", the crowd chorused.

Raman Nair loaded both barrels, took careful aim, and fired one of them. The bullet sped true to its mark and shattered the broken water-pot.

A yell of "Well done!" went up from the coolies.

This appeared to flatter him and he insisted that he should try out the second barrel on some other target. After a little delay in searching, a boy picked up an old bucket from the garbage heap. It was also balanced in the crotch where the water-pot had been placed.

Raman Nair aimed for a longer while this tune. The bullet from the second barrel sent the bucket spinning into the long grass behind.

The crowd was delighted. "Good shot!" someone yelled, "you're a marksman!"

Raman Nair stuck out his chest and felt himself a different person. His fear of the man-eater had vanished.

"Is the rifle alright?" asked John.

"It is, O white man", replied the Malayali pompously, "and I don't need any more cartridges. With these nine bullets that are left I, Raman Nair alone, will slay the man-eater this very night".

Everyone yelled, "So be it", and John and Chicka joined in the acclamation.

John left the .470 with the Malayali and told the coolie-maistry to bring Raman Nair, together with two young buffaloes for bait which he would pay for if they were killed and a number of workers to help in tying the two machans, to the bungalow at exactly 1 o'clock, when he would join them and go to the Karadi Arr, to reach there by 2 p.m. He reckoned that by the time they had selected the places at which they were going to sit and had built the two machans, it would be after 4 o'clock.

Then he and Chicka returned to the bungalow for lunch.

Shortly after 1 o'clock the maistry with Raman Nair and

some twenty-five coolies arrived, bringing two buffalo calves with them.

John had armed himself with his 450/400 Jeffries as his next best weapon. He offered Nair the pick of two electric torches, each holding three cells, and when the Malayali had selected one, handed him the pair of clamps for fixing it on to the .470. For himself, with corresponding clamps, he attached the remaining torch to the 450/400.

Then the whole party, with Chicka accompanying them, set out for the little stream. Greystone led them to the fresh pug-marks he and the Karumba had found that morning, and told Raman Nair his plan of tying the baits and sitting up where the scrub ended and the rocks began. He gave it as his opinion that the tiger would probably return the same way that night, but offered the Malayali his choice of position.

Raman Nair gazed upwards at the hill for a while and said, "You sit on this side. I shall go to the opposite part of the hill as I feel the tiger will come that way".

The planter agreed at once, while smiling to himself in appreciation of the astute way in which the Malayali had contrived to select the more remote chance of encountering the tigress on her way back.

Raman Nair chose one of the calves and the coolies split up into two units, one to accompany John and the other, Nair, to tie their machans for them.

John and Chicka, with their party leading the remaining calf, started to climb the little hill across the river. When they reached the rocky section, he estimated that the opposite side of the hillock where Raman Nair had elected to sit, might be a quarter of a mile distant.

At the spot where he stood there were no trees high enough to allow of a machan being erected. Only scrub jungle, grass and boulders.

Chicka had noted this too and said, "*Dorai* , there's nothing for it but to either lie prone on the top of any of the higher boulders, or sit with your back against one of them facing the buffalo-calf which we will tie some thirty feet in front of you.

"And if you listen to me", he added, "I would advise you to sit with your back to a rock. The tigress cannot then attack from the rear. She can only come from in front or either side, and you can watch all three directions. The boulders here are not sufficiently high, and if you lie on top of one you'll be within easy springing range of the tigress who will probably see you from the hilltop".

Greystone agreed, and at the same time wondered which selection Raman Nair would make. It was almost a certainty that there would also be no big tree on the opposite side of this rocky hill. He would either have to choose one of the same alternatives or lose face before the coolies by refusing to sit for the tigress.

Chicka and he began to search for a suitable rock, and simultaneously they spotted it. The hill had been furroughed by a narrow watercourse that ran down its side. This nullah commenced from near the summit and led sharply downhill in almost a straight line to the foot of the hillock, where it emptied itself into the Karadi Arr.

The rock that they saw was about fifty yards up the hill from where they stood and on the further bank of the watercourse. Its base had been worn into a hollow by the force of water that came roaring down the hill during the monsoon.

John agreed that if he sat in that hollow with his back to the rock he would be completely safe from an attack by the tigress from any direction. At the same time, if he tied the buffalo-bait on the bed of this small nullah and within 25 to 30 yards of where he was sitting, it would be clearly visible to the tigress from anywhere higher up the hill.

An added advantage would be to have Chicka erect a brief zareba of thorns, camouflaged with leaves and grass, in front of him to hide him from view.

John and Chicka pondered these various points of safety from all angles and discussed them in whispers.

Greystone was well-satisfied with the selection and they agreed that his position under the water-worn rock was relatively safe from unexpected attack from any quarter.

The coolies had brought their hatchets for the purpose of cutting wood for the machan they were to put up. In an undertone,

Chicka told them of the new plan and set them the task of gathering thorns, leaves, grass and the tendrils of creepers growing on the slopes below. These thorns the coolies, with Chicka's help and under John's directions, built into a wall two feet thick by about three feet high across the entrance to the hollowed rock which John found large enough to comfortably seat him along with his equipment. In amongst the thorns Chicka skillfully entwined the creepers, grass and leaves to make the zareba resemble one of the natural thickets that abounded along the watercourse.

The work was finished much earlier than would have been possible with a regular machan and it was not yet 4 o'clock when the buffalo-calf was tethered to the wooden stake they hacked from the stem of one of the thicker shrubs.

A few minutes later Greystone sent the Karumba and the coolies away with parting instructions to come for him at break of day but approach no closer than the bed of the stream from where they were to call.

It was stifling under the rock despite the shade it cast as the afternoon turned to evening. Down the hill, beyond the buffalo-bait, John could see the bed of the Karadi Arr and hear the partridges calling in the distance, "Kee-Kok! Kok! Kok! Kee-Kok! Kok! ,Kok!" For the most part it was hidden by the trees that grew thickly on the banks, but now and again through a gap in the foliage he could glimpse the golden brown of the river sands and the silvery sheen of reflection off the thin stream of water that trickled over them.

There came to his ears the farewell notes of the birds of the day as they went to roost. A wood-pecker tapped against a dead branch, "Tok! Tok! Tok! Tok!" and a green barbet closer by trilled loudly. "Kot-tooroo! Kot-tooroo!"

It became quite dark under the rock by six o'clock, although as he looked past the heifer grazing placidly in the open John could still make out the various tones of green worn by the big trees lining the stream below.

The mosquitoes had not yet discovered him, but a column of large black ants on the march found him in their way. The scouts that move in advance of such bodies hurriedly went back and gave the message to the winding line a few yards behind, and the ants avoided him by changing their course. They passed down the nullah

on the other side of the wall of thorns. For two hours after that he could still hear the indefinite, scraping, delicate little sounds made by the millions of their tiny marching feet as the horde continued on its set purpose.

The silence was shattered at 10 o'clock when a barking-deer voiced its strident alarm on the opposite side of the hill. Persistently it kept calling, telling the denizens of the forest that danger was afoot. Could the little animal have scented the tigress?

Somewhere from the hill-top a brain-fever bird took up the startled cry. "Brain-fever! Brain-fever! Brain-fever!" it screamed in mounting, augmenting crescendo, to attain a pitch of hysterical intensity. From the stream-bed below the demoniac screech of a night-heron echoed the jungle's warning.

What beastly luck, thought John to himself. The brute has gone to the other side. I wonder if the Malayali will shoot it. If only he does, he will cockcrow like hell.

Hardly had the thought come to him when he heard a long-drawn-out, piercing wail. It sounded eerie and unhuman and seemed to be coming from far, far away. There was no direction to it. The shriek just came, lingered and stopped abruptly.

John felt the hair on the nape of his neck stand on end.

"What, in heaven's name, could have made that ghastly noise?

Was it the death-scream of some animal, uttered with its last breath as the tigress killed it? The sound was unlike that caused by any creature he had ever heard.

Was it human? It seemed far from that.

Was it supernatural? He did not believe in ghosts and ghouls.

Then, what could it have been?

After a while John thought he had found the solution. Obviously some strange bird of the night had strayed here to voice that queer cry.

Following this disturbance there was no other sound for the rest of the night.

Around 3 o'clock in the morning it became distinctly cold,

followed an hour later by a heavy dewfall that left John chilled, clammy and disgruntled. His eyes burned from lack of sleep as he hearkened to the early crowing of the jungle-cocks on the stream below heralding the dawn.

The tops of the green trees turned to delicate shell pink and turquoise-blue as the first rays of the rising sun kissed the dew-drops on them. Another day was born.

Shortly later John heard Chicka's high-pitched 'Halloa' from the bed of the Karadi Arr. Rising stiffly to his feet, he shouted back to him to approach as there was no danger.

When Chicka and the party of men arrived, John stepped forth and stretched himself after handing his rifle to the Karumba. Then he told them about the weird sound he had heard the previous night.

"It was the goddess that rides on the man-eater's neck", asserted a coolie. "She was crying aloud to warn the animal that danger lay ahead. That was the reason why it never came near the bait".

All of them began to descend the hill, the last man dragging the calf by the rope around its neck. They were almost at the stream when a medley of voices from the scrub on the hillside behind fell upon their ears. There were calls and frantic shouts to them to stop.

They halted.

A minute later an irregular line of running men broke into view and Chicka and the coolies recognized the other group who had gone to fetch Raman Nair.

The foremost of the runners called jerkily, "Come quickly. The Malayali has been killed and partly eaten by the man-eater". The coolies who were with John started to run towards the men approaching them. Both met, and there was much jabbering and gesticulating. By then Chicka and Greystone had followed and the whole band started walking rapidly to the scene of the tragedy.

Raman Nair's body lay on its back at the foot of a large flat boulder which was perhaps eight feet in height. His clothes had been torn off and the chest and one thigh were eaten. Even in death his eyes glared at John accusingly, as if he knew all along that this was only a ruse to encompass his end. They were wide-opened in

terror and his face yet held the sullen, ill-tempered look it had invariably worn in life.

John looked around for his .470 rifle but could find no trace of it. Then he understood what must have happened. The Malayali had not been sitting on the ground when the tiger had leaped on him. He had been lying on top of the flat boulder that stood beside them. The tigress, or a tiger, whichever was the man-eater—had leapt on to him there and knocked him down. The rifle must still be on the top of that rock.

"Chicka, get up this rock and see if my rifle is there", he asked his retainer.

The Karumba clambered up like a monkey. The next instant he held up John's weapon in his right hand and seven brass cartridges in his left. From the top he handed the rifle down, butt first, to John.

It was fully loaded and cocked, and there were two rounds in the breech. Evidently Raman Nair had been quite unaware that the man-eater was stalking him. He had just had time to utter those unearthly screams that John had heard while the tigress was killing him. Despite the Malayali's behavior, John liked to think that he had died suddenly and painlessly. For his end had been a truly horrible one.

At Greystone's directions, the coolies cut saplings from the undergrowth and constructed a rough bier on to which they rolled the mangled remains of the erstwhile fiery agitator. Then four of them lifted the bier to their shoulders and started walking downhill.

Almost directly below, as they stepped on to the cool, soft, moist sands of the Karadi Arr, were the pug-marks of a large tigress. She had drunk water there only a few hours previously, while it was yet dark.

And she had come from the hill to the west, from the place where Raman Nair had been killed and partly eaten.

There was no doubt about it now; the man-eater was a tigress!

Chapter 20
Ruth Achieves Her Purpose

Ruth reclined on the sofa with her feet curled up smoking a cigarette. She was prey to a mixture of feelings and not one of them was pleasant.

It was 7 o'clock and almost dark outside. In the room where she sat the large oil lamp standing on the table in the centre had already been lighted. Fifteen minutes previously Chandra had stepped in soundlessly and attended to this task, and as noiselessly departed. He hadn't even glanced at her.

This was the time of evening when Ruth felt most depressed. The hours seemed to drag on interminably. John had left shortly after 1 o'clock that afternoon with the Malayali and the coolies to sit up for the man-eater. He had told her not to expect him before morning. She was faced with the prospect of spending the night alone in the bungalow and was decidedly nervous.

She knew the proper thing would be for her to be filled with anxiety for her husband. Dimly Ruth was aware that she had no such feelings. She was not behaving as a wife ought to, but this was because she could not force herself to think as a wife should.

Was she wrong in being so callous and self-centred?

For a time Ruth tried honestly to find the answer. But her selfish nature came to her rescue. Very definitely no; she really could not blame herself for being indifferent. It was all John's fault. He had made her this way. Did he for a moment expect a young woman to keep her own company for hours together while he was out on the estate? Did he expect her to be alone during the depressing twilight hours while he was shooting tigers?

Oh, if only someone was here to talk to her—help her to spend this dull evening in company! Then she would not feel so lonely—so helpless—so much neglected.

And it would be particularly nice if the young D.S.P. would come. Idly Ruth glanced out of the front door of the room, across the verandah, and into the darkness of the night. The air throbbed with the chirping of wood-crickets in the forest to the east and from

the densely-packed rows of coffee bushes growing on the opposite side.

As if in answer to her unspoken wish she noticed the dual headlights of a car suddenly twinkle off and on in the distance, growing brighter and bigger as the vehicle came nearer and nearer.

Ruth became interested and began to guess. Was it really coming to the bungalow? Could it be Ted?

At last the car swung into the compound and approached the portico. A few minutes later it came to a halt and the lights were extinguished. It was too dark for her to be able to see either the vehicle or its driver clearly.

A figure got out on the further side, slammed the door, and called, "Anybody at home?" It was Ted Baker's voice,

Happily Ruth jumped up from the sofa and went on to the, verandah. "Hi Ted! I'm glad you've come", she greeted.

"Good evening Ruth", he answered, "I had nothing to do and so, came along to see how you and John are getting on after the recent excitement".

"John's not at home", she said, "but please sit down while I fix you a drink.

Ted followed her into the drawing-room and sat on the sofa. Ruth walked across to the table at the corner and poured a double-whisky.

"Would you like some iced soda?" she asked.

"Thank you, that would be nice", he accepted.

Ruth walked a few steps to the doorway leading to the rear and called, "Chandra! Please come here".

Wraith-like, the bearer appeared to slide into the room.

She could not get out of the habit of giving a slight start each time he did this. She started once again now. Was this wretched servant conscious of the effect his noiseless appearances were having on her nerves that he persisted in making them? It certainly appeared to be so.

She forced herself to speak unconcernedly.

"Will you please bring a bottle of iced soda from the refrigerator?"

The bearer did not reply. He merely disappeared as silently as he had come.

Ruth sat herself on the sofa next to Ted, but before she could say anything more, Chandra re-entered the room and approached the liquor-table with three bottles of soda in his right hand. He picked up a full bottle of whisky from there, placed it on a tray with two tumblers and the three bottles of soda, added a gadget that was bottle-opener and cork-screw combined, and carried the tray to place it on a side table next to her.

Ruth frowned. The implications in his action were clear. She had asked for one bottle of soda. He had fetched three and a full bottle of Scotch. She remembered that he was making a practice of doing the same thing each time she ordered him to bring her anything in the way of an alcoholic drink. Almost as if he had spoken the words, Ruth knew he was thinking: "Here, you drunken hussy; gorge yourself on these".

Her hand, that still held the tumbler with the double whisky she had poured for Ted, trembled visibly with ill controlled anger.

The next instant Chandra faded from the room. Ruth handed the glass to the Superintendent.

"Please open the soda and help yourself", she invited. And then, "Pour me a double, too; with just a dash of soda".

The D.S.P. opened the bottle of whisky and did as she had asked him, handing a tumbler with the little soda to her and almost filling the other for himself.

"Cheers!" Ruth said and raised her glass.

"Here's mud in your eye!" he answered jocularly.

They sipped their drinks awhile in silence.

"Where's John?" Ted inquired, striving to make his voice appear casual and unconcerned.

"He has located the tiger's den and has gone with that agitator to shoot it. He said he would not be back before morning. It's indeed a good thing you turned up. I was feeling terribly lonely".

Baker sat forward in the sofa, keenly interested. "By gad, I wish I had come earlier", he returned, "I would have insisted that John took me along".

The trend of his thoughts was not lost on her, but if she resented them Ruth did not show it. Inwardly she determined to tempt this man again and to turn his mind into channels that would be of far greater interest to her.

Gently she moved closer to him and murmured, "And leave me all alone tonight?"

Her words and the invitation they carried conveyed themselves clearly to Ted. But for the moment he was not interested. He was thinking only of the tiger.

"I wish John had taken me seriously and gave me a chance of having a smack at him", he repeated. “I would enjoy the thrill of trying to shoot this man-eater".

Ruth listened in silence. Then she answered, "John has taken it frightfully in earnest, you know. Especially the part that he and that horrible man should each sit alone to shoot the tiger. I'm doubtful he would have been keen on you accompanying him on this occasion".

"I expect you're right", Ted admitted, "Naturally he would not like me butting-in and upsetting the arrangement".

"But is it so very important as all that?" she cut in. "As long as the tiger is killed, does it matter who kills it?"

"I'm afraid it does, Ruth", he replied, "you see, John is trying to show his coolies that he gave this other man an equal chance of killing the man-eater and that he failed to do it".

"Suppose this man kills it—and not John. What then?" she asked.

Baker pursed his lips for a few seconds. "That would not be so good—for John", he said finally, as he drained his tumbler.

Ruth had been waiting for him to do this as she had finished her drink some moments before. "Come, let's have another", she invited, "help yourself and me". As she leaned forward to accept the glass, Ruth came still closer to him.

She finished her drink rapidly, setting down her empty

tumbler on the side-table and said, "Let's not talk about the tiger any more. Let's talk about ourselves".

Ted glanced at her and noticed allurement in her eyes. He looked at the sleeveless Jersey she was wearing that fitted her tightly like a glove. Ruth saw that he was looking and deliberately crossed her legs, carelessly hitching up her dress. She was wearing no stockings and Ted noticed the soft white roundness of her thigh swelling above the bare knee. The blood began to course through his veins and the skin at his temples bulged and pulsated with desire.

He tried to regain his composure and conjured up before his mind's eye the face of old Robbie Nicholson who had warned him so forcefully against this temptress. Now he realised to the full how right his former chief had been and how base was this woman who sat beside him.

With this thought in mind he turned to Ruth. Before he lost control of himself he decided to appeal to what self-respect was left in both of them.

"Ruth", he said, "let's be fair to John. I've only met him recently but I like him. And he's your husband. If we give in to our feelings again, this thing will grow between us and we shall never be able to stop it".

"Then let it grow!" Ruth declared vehemently, filling each of their glasses with a good two inches of whisky and not adding any soda this time. "How long does John think I can be neglected? Doesn't he realise I'm a woman and want a man to be with me, care for me and make a fuss of me?"

The last vestiges of probity left in him prompted Ted to respond in defence of her husband.

"I expect he must be pretty busy on the estate", he answered, "it's a huge place and requires a lot of supervision. And just now to make matters worse with this man-eater and the trouble from the damned Congress people, his hands must be full. Why don't you give him a break by being a little patient?"

Ruth looked up at him angrily. For a moment she felt like retorting. Then the temptress within assured her this man was weakening. The words he had spoken had been uttered to bolster

up his own tottering resistance rather than to influence her. She determined to use her art to the utmost to conquer him —to master him—to make him her slave.

"Poor Ted", she replied soothingly, "I admire your efforts to be loyal to John. But I also know you are human, like I am; that you want me, like I want you; and can't resist the temptation".

Shamelessly she slid the zip closing the neck of the yellow jersey that fitted her so tightly. It opened to reveal she was wearing nothing beyond a brassiere that now came plainly into view, clasping her breasts as they heaved visibly with the urge of her mounting passion.

"Let's have another drink, and this time a really big one", she invited.

Mechanically Ted took the preferred glass almost half-full of neat whisky and poured the raw liquor down his throat. He watched Ruth do the same. As he looked at her, her eyes glazed and took on the vapid expression of intoxication. Her lip curled grotesquely in a half-smile of drunken derision. With her right hand she caught her brassiere from beneath and jerked it upwards, hard. First her left breast broke free, and then the right one. They stood glaringly naked before him.

Ted finished the rest of his drink at a gulp, the fiery liquor catching his breath. His eyes glued themselves on those bare mounds of pink flesh, each capped by its purplish areola and protruding nipple, the colour of soft strawberry red. Without looking, his left hand with the empty tumbler groped for the side-table, found it, and set the glass down. His eyes grew blood-shot with mounting lust. Sucking in his breath, he leaned forward with outstretched hands to seize her tempting flesh. With a moan of inviting surrender Ruth slipped beneath him on the soft expanse of the wide sofa.

For the next half-hour, they lost themselves in a delirium of lust, inflamed still more by the whisky they had consumed. Forgetful of right or wrong, Ted set himself the task of satisfying this sex-crazed woman who was lying panting below him, always asking for more and still more. His own passions aroused to the utmost, he entirely forgot himself and his surroundings, determined to give her all that she expected of him.

And so, it was that the pair of them were quite oblivious to the dark face of the man that watched them from behind the embroidered muslin curtain hanging across the window.

There was hate on that face, contempt and surprise,

Then came a look of carnal desire as he took in the details of the scene being enacted before him and the voluptuous abandoned movements of the passion-crazed man and woman entwined together on the sofa.

The man was thinking. Is this the loyalty of a wife to husband? What would I not give to be in the place of this man and to have this white woman all alone to myself?

He watched them till, through the sheer exhaustion induced by their spent passion, they finally lay inert and consumed.

Ted was the first to become aware of the passage of time. The man slid into obscurity as the policeman sat up on the sofa, pulling at his khaki shirt to straighten it. He glanced at the clock on the wall. It indicated the time as five minutes after nine o'clock. Then he looked down at Ruth. She was sleeping the deep sleep of a drunken and satisfied woman. Ted felt he was not justified in awakening her.

Unsteadily he got to his feet, swayed perceptibly, and then walked out on to the verandah and down the steps to the portico and his Buick.

He fumbled with the ignition and trod on the self -tarter. There came a harsh sound as it turned the engine, which spluttered and came to life. A minute later his car moved away on the road to Nilambur.

Ruth still slept on the sofa in the disarray in which Ted had left her. The man gazed at her form and felt himself tempted afresh. But the hate in his mind overcame the urge of his flesh.

Chapter 21
Chicka Has a Plan

It was nearing 10 o'clock that morning before John got back to his bungalow. He had directed that Raman Nair's body be carried to the coolie-lines and arranged for a message to be sent at once to the police at Nilambur, reporting the death of the Malayali. They would want to hold an inquest.

Ruth was sitting in one of the cane chairs in the front verandah when he climbed the steps. Greystone walked up to her and kissed the top of her head. Then leaning both his rifles against a corner, he sank into the chair next to hers and called for Chandra.

"Please bring me a strong cup of coffee and some biscuits. I'm famished".

Turning to Ruth, he announced, "Our attempt last night ended in a tragedy, darling". And then he told if her what had happened.

Ruth bent forward in surprise, "Do you really mean that swine has been killed?"

"Precisely", John returned; then added, "what a quirk of fate, eh?"

"Good old man-eater!" Ruth interjected, with evident glee, "at last you've done something really useful".

"Your coffee and biscuits, *sahib* ".

Chandra had come back as noiselessly as usual and stood solicitously at the side of his employer preferring a tray with the snacks.

John looked up to thank him. The bearer's countenance wore a satanic look as he glared malevolently at Ruth. Quickly Greystone glanced at his wife. But she was looking out of the window and had noticed nothing.

Rather stiffly John said, "Thank you. Please leave, the tray on the table here. Yes, that's it".

The look of hatred vanished from Chandra's face. It now wore its usual placid expression. He inclined his head slightly,

turned, and left the room.

My God; he has overheard Ruth, thought Greystone to himself. In a low voice, he said to his wife, "I think Chandra heard what you said. There was a murderous look on his face just now".

"Who cares", she replied disdainfully, and next, "I wish you would get rid of that man, John. He gives me the creeps, moving about as furtively as he does like a beastly ghost".

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Chicka who stood differentially at the foot of the verandah steps. John saw him, got up, and walked towards him.

"What's it, Chicka?" he inquired.

"Yesterday morning, when I offered to search for the tiger alone", replied the Karumba, "your honour in the kindness of his heart insisted in accompanying me.

"However, what has happened, has happened. Doubtless it was old wind-bag's fate to be killed. "Will the *dorai* please give me leave of absence for two days so that I may fulfil a plan I have in mind of slaying this tigress? But I can only do it singlehanded, and not with the *dorai* accompanying me".

"What is this plan?" Greystone demanded.

The Karumba hesitated awhile. Then he said, "Your honour perhaps has sticks of dynamite which he uses for blasting rocks on the estate? I will search now till I find the den in which this man-eater lives. Then you can blow up the entrance in the middle of the day while she's asleep inside, in such a way that the rocks fall down and bury her alive.

"But before this can be clone, as I said just now, her den must be located. That's a task that only I, stalking by myself, can accomplish".

The scheme seemed foolish and impossible and John said so in no uncertain terms. He did not feel justified in permitting this little jungle man to expose himself to the frightful risk of searching for the man-eater's den alone, and unarmed at that.

"Chicka, I think your idea is ridiculous. In the first place, the tigress will probably kill you long before you get anywhere near her. At least you had better take my heavy rifle and some cartridges

with you".

Chicka shook his head. "No *dorai* , it will be useless. I do not know how to use the weapon".

"When do you intend to start?" John inquired.

"At midday, as soon as I have had my meal", the Karumba answered.

"And when do you expect to return?" was the next Question.

Chicka was silent for a few minutes. Then he smiled hugely. "If I do not report to your honour by tomorrow at sunset, don't worry about me anymore. You may make other arrangements to kill the tigress and get yourself another shikari".

He was stark, staring, raving mad, John decided.

"If that happens, it is I who will have been responsible for your life or rather, for your death", Grey-stone stated flatly.

"Oh no, master, you will not", put in the little man quickly, "for I'm about to quit your service as of this moment. But I shall apply for re-employment tomorrow evening, if your honour is good enough to take me back and if I am lucky enough to return myself".

With those words, as if to terminate the conversation, he ‘salaamed’ quickly and was gone.

An hour later, from the window of his dressing-room, John saw the little figure walking towards the jungle. The only weapon he carried was his axe.

Chapter 22
A Race with Time

It was past midday and a few tiny clouds floated in an expanse of blue-grey sky when Chicka crossed the Karadi Arr on his way to the flat rock on the top of; which the tigress had attacked the Malayali.

From now on, he knew he held his life in his hands. The ground was baked hard by the merciless rays of the sun and the clumps of grass between the rocks were tinder-dry. No rain had fallen for the past four or five months and there would be no hope of looking for tracks in that stony terrain. He would have follow other means and other signs for finding the tigress' den.

Crouching in the shade cast by the rock, his keen eyes searched the cliff at the hilltop where it fell abruptly for about thirty feet. There was no cave to be seen. From where he was standing the boulders, interspaced with stretches of sheet-rock, ran upwards to the base of the cliff. It was almost certain no tiger would lair there. For one thing, there was no greenery. For another, it was far too hot. He knew that tigers loved cool and shady places. Unlike their smaller cousins, the panthers, they cannot tolerate the heat.

Therefore, the cave, if there was one, was certainly not on this side or on either flank, both of which were clearly visible to him and equally bare of vegetation Maybe it was on the opposite side near some natural cover. Or perhaps they were all wrong and the tigress did not live on this hillock at all.

Stealthily, Chicka commenced to climb upwards, using infinite care to make certain his bare feet dislodged no stone that might betray his approach. Their soles burned agonisingly as they touched each heated stone.

A short while later he stood at the bottom of the cliff. Looking back, he could clearly see the flat rock ion which Raman Nair had been lying when he was killed and the scrub jungle below that, stretching to the Karadi Arr as it wound by the foot of the hillock.

Now it became plain why the Malayali had been attacked,

and Chicka congratulated himself on his advice to John to sit at the base of a boulder. For any tiger, standing at that height, must have clearly seen Raman Nair lying on the rock below.

Chicka continued along the foot of the ridge that gradually curved to the north.

Suddenly a grey shape leaped up before him and scampered up the bluff with apparent ease. It was only a langoor monkey, but it gave him a nasty start.

Cautiously he went on and met more langoors. Some of them scrambled up the ridge at his approach while others bounded downhill.

Chicka did not like this at all. They were making quite a noise with their sudden movements and would awaken and alarm the tigress. She might come out after them—and discover him!

Rather hesitantly he went forward a little way. Another langoor rushed out from behind a boulder and ran along the cliff-base, away from him. But this one came to a sudden halt, froze for a moment, and turned to bound back almost on top of him. Then it changed its course and sprang downhill.

Chicka stopped too. Why had the monkey behaved in such an extraordinary fashion?

Was the tigress lying concealed somewhere ahead?

Clammy with fear, the little Karumba stood motionless while these questions and the possible answers flashed rapidly through his brain. After that, inch by inch, he tip-toed onwards.

He came to the spot where the langoor had halted so suddenly.

Around the corner was an opening in the foot of the cliff.

It was the entrance to a cave.

No doubt the tigress was inside, and that was what had alarmed the monkey.

Hastily Chicka stepped backwards out of sight of that ominous cavern. He glanced downhill to pick up landmarks that would enable him to locate the cave again from below. Skirting the foot of the hillock flowed the Karadi Arr, bound by its double row

of trees that marked each bank. Prominent among these he noticed a dead tree on the nearer edge, made conspicuous by the bare boughs that reached skywards. He knew that if he went to the foot of that dead tree and looked upwards, he would be able to see the cave from there.

The rocks and boulders were still warm from the heat of the sun as Chicka retraced his steps silently and jumped from one to another. At last he trod upon the cool, moist sands of the river, and they were soothing to the blistered soles of his bare feet.

His careful stalking had taken more time than he reckoned, for he was returning none too soon. It was late afternoon by now and the sun was approaching the western horizon. In an hour, the tigress would come forth on her evening prowl.

Quickly he turned and walked upstream in search of the dead tree. He found it after going nearly a furlong, growing on the western bank just as he had seen it from the top of the hillock.

Chicka strode to the foot of the tree and looked up at the hill. There, at the bottom of the cliff, he was now able to clearly see the entrance to the cave. He had been successful at last. He had located the man-eater's den.

The Karumba observed he had reached a section of the river which he and his master had not visited two days previously when they had searched for tracks. That had been further downstream. To return to the bungalow from where he now stood would entail a walk through the jungle in a diagonal direction in order to meet the footpath they had traversed the first time, leading directly from the bungalow to the Karadi Arr.

Chicka had covered about half-a-mile of this distance when he heard voices ahead. He was on the point of calling out when the thought struck him: Who could these men be that dared to remain in a jungle with a man-eater abroad and at sunset, too? That made him decide to investigate further and he silently approached the place from where the sounds were coming.

The little man halted when he reached a clearing in the jungle. In the dimming light, he could make out the forms of half-a-dozen men, seated in a small circle. They were speaking in Malayalam and he could hear hem distinctly.

Two of the individuals were busily engaged in the process of lighting a fire from a large leap of dried branches that had been stacked on the ground.

"The fool got himself killed by the tiger", one of them was saying. "Fancy accepting a challenge to shoot to, along with the white man!"

"But is that story a fact?" another asked incredulously.

"I got it from the lips of one of the coolies" the first speaker continued. "Instead of getting on with killing the planter and burning his bungalow, Raman Nair allowed the white man to talk the coolies out of their intention and permitted him to throw this challenge. So, it came about that the idiot was unable to extricate himself from accepting, as these fools of coolies thought it great fun. At their employer's suggestion, I expect they insisted he should agree".

"Why do we waste time talking about his stupidity, Chacko?" interrupted a third speaker, "as it is we're endangering ourselves by remaining in this tiger-haunted spot. When do we set forth to burn the Forest Departmental buildings?" he glanced nervously around the jungle as he spoke.

"Don't let the tiger frighten you" assured the man who had been addressed as Chacko, "as long as the six of us remain close together and there is a fire burning, it will not dare to attack us. We will leave here punctually at midnight. Papachen will pick us up in the Ford a mile beyond the planter's bungalow, at exactly 1 a.m. We'll be at the Forest Chowki by about 1-30. One of the Guards, Kunji Nair, will meet the car and take us to the depot where the sandalwood is stored and we will set fire to that".

"Is Papachen bringing the petrol with him?" a new voice inquired.

"Yes; eight gallons of it", replied Chacko, adding the words, "in two jerry-cans".

Chicka felt he had heard enough. Cautiously he withdrew from his hiding place and hastened to find the footpath that would lead him to the bungalow so that he might inform his master.

John and Ruth were just about to sit down to an early dinner when the Karumba presented himself.

"*Dorai* ", he called softly in Tamil, "I crave audience with you alone. It's most urgent".

The imperative note in his voice caused Greystone to say, "Excuse me a minute, Ruth".

He strode down the steps to the portico. Earnestly, Chicka beckoned him into the garden. There he related about finding the tigress' den and how he had stumbled upon the conspirators and overheard their conversation.

Greystone knew that the two men, Chacko and Papachen, were the same persons who had captured June and caused the riot at Ooparpet. He thought still further. Old Gardner would try to stop them. In that event, they would not hesitate to kill him—and June!

At thought of June Gardner, John Greystone became galvanizes into action. He glanced at his wrist-watch. It showed 7-45 p.m.

John hurried back to the dining-room, where he quickly repeated to Ruth all that Chicka had said. Then he continued, "I'm going in the jeep to warn Mr. Gardener, and to Nilambur to fetch the police. You'd better come along with me, Ruth. It will not be safe for you to remain here alone".

Ruth and Chicka followed him to the garage. Soon the jeep roared away into the darkness, the red light behind growing fainter with the distance.

Chandra watched them silently from the verandah.

Driving as fast as he could, it took John over twenty minutes to cover the 10 miles of rough track that led to the Gardner's quarters. He would have liked to go -faster, but the jeep was lurching wildly.

Father and daughter were having dinner when he brought the vehicle to a halt before their verandah.

Saying, "Please wait here" to Ruth, he burst unceremoniously in upon them.

The ranger looked up in surprise while June smiled a welcome. But John took no notice of it. Speaking fast, he told them what Chicka had overheard. Then continued, "And please come along with me, Miss Gardner. Your presence here will make matters

worse".

Neville Gardner understood perfectly. But June was stubborn.

"My place is beside dad", she asserted, "I will not leave him."

"Go Junie; please go", begged her father.

“Yes, come Miss Gardner. It's not wise for you to remain here. Those two scoundrels, Chacko and Papachen, will know that it is you who have given the alarm. They may kill you", Greystone chimed in.

The old man tried again, "Junie; I plead with you. Go!"

June was adamant. Somewhat coldly she looked at John. Then her glance softened. In a quiet but firm voice, she spoke to him,

"I appreciate your offer, but could I possibly desert daddy? Would I ever forgive myself if anything happened to him? You must not forget", and here she smiled serenely, "together we make two guns. Alone, he makes only one".

John realised there was no reply to such an argument. Vaguely, he wished his wife could have been present to hear it as he hurried back to the jeep to race for help.

It was exactly 8:45 p.m.,

The direct route to Nilambur rejoined the main road; 12 miles further on, making the total distance 50 miles. Due to the bad section of track for those first twelve; miles, it was 10:45 p.m. before John reached his destination, and 10:50 by the time he found Ted.

Once more a dozen steel-helmeted and fully armed policemen scrambled into the Black Maria that was kept constantly ready, and at exactly 11:05 p.m. the police party, headed by the jeep with John driving, Ted next to him, and Ruth and Chicka in the rear, commenced the return journey.

According to Chicka, Chacko and his five companions were to meet Papachen with the petrol in the car a mile beyond John's bungalow on the way to the Ranger's quarters at exactly 10’O clock in the morning. That left the arsonists only 9 miles to cover, so that they would reach the chowki and start setting fire to the

sandalwood store at about 1:30 a.m.

It had taken John two hours to cover 50 miles in the jeep. Would the broader and more heavily laden Maria be able to do the journey in the 2 hours and 25 minutes left before the attack was made by those two murderers and their ruffian assistants?

The race to the Forest Chowki would be a close one. John knew they could not hope to reach the quarters before the miscreants arrived. But would they be in time to stop arson and murder, if not even I worse, from being committed?

His foot pressed harder on the accelerator and the jeep lurched crazily as it responded to his further urging. The speedometer indicated 50 m.p.h. and the lights of the Black Maria behind began to recede in the distance.

John knew that fast driving now would be required to compensate for the very slow progress they would make over that last bad stretch of 12 miles of roadway, where they could hardly average 10 mph, and so he bent his mind fully to the task before him.

Chapter 23
The Attack at Midnight

After John Greystone had left, Gardener and June prepared themselves to face eventualities.

One of the Forest Guards had already deserted. That left the Forester and four others to be reckoned with. The Forester was a Tamilian. He was a comparatively old man, mild-natured and on the eye of retirement like

Neville Gardener himself, and seemed to wield little or no influence over his underlings. Of the four Guards, one was a Muslim, another an Indian Christian, and the remaining two were men from Kanara, of Konkan extraction.

The initial attack was to be directed on the sandalwood storeroom, a large godown-like structure about sixty feet square, with a roof of round tiles and a stone flooring to keep out the white-ants. The sandalwood felled in the surrounding jungles, was a great value to the Government, being used for the extraction of an essential oil that formed the base in many makes of toilet requisites. It was safe to say that the value of wood in storage just then approached one-hundred thousand rupees!

That was why the rebels wanted to burn it, their objective was to inflict loss upon the Government, and Neville Gardener and his daughter determined to prevent this destruction at any cost.

The Range Officer summoned the Forester and the four Guards to his verandah and bluntly asked if they were prepared to help him to protect the wood from being destroyed. There was no answer at first as the five men silently weighed the pros and cons of saving the sandalwood. In their minds, it all boiled down to this. Which party was going to emerge victorious from the struggle that was being wages throughout the country. Would it be the British Government or the Nationalist Party?

If they helped the arsonist and the Government gained the upper hand, they could expect dismissal or jail. At the very least, if they helped the Government but the Britishers eventually collapsed and left the country, they would be abandoned to the mercies of the revolutionists and would probably lose their jobs any-how, if not

their lives.

Eventually the Muslim and the Indian Christian volunteered to help, but the Forester and the remaining two men, after some more hesitation, said it would be too dangerous.

Gardner ordered these three individuals to go to their quarters and lock themselves inside, with a warming that if he saw them assisting those who were coming to set fire to the sandalwood, he would see that they were severely punished.

With no comment, they walked to their respective houses. It was 10 o'clock, with yet another three-and-a-half hours to go before the rebels would arrive. Gardner brought his Paradox and June her Springfield rifle and they took up their positions along with the two loyal Forest Guards in front of the godown.

Exactly at 1:20 a. m. they heard the throbbing of a motor-car, it stopped at short distance away. That fact betrayed the identity of the occupants. Had it been the police, they would have driven right up to the chowki. The arsonists had arrived but did not want their presence to be discovered as they hoped to make the attack a complete surprise.

Doubtless by now, the traitorous guard, Kunji Nair had met the party and was leading them to their objective.

Ten minutes of utter silence passed.

Then three figures detached themselves from the wall of trees that bordered the clearing in which the storerooms had been constructed and commenced to advance furtively towards the little building.

"Halt! Or I'll shoot" Gardner barked in English, at the same tune pressing the button of the electric torch he carried.

The beam shone forth to clearly reveal the miscreants. The leader was the missing Forest Guard.

"What are you doing here, Kunji Nair?" the Ranger asked, now speaking in Malayalam, "the game is up and we know all about your plot. I shall see you get jail for this".

The Guard did not answer. He stood still while his two companions hesitated.

"Come here at once", Gardner ordered.

The terrified man began to approach. He halted when he was a few feet away.

"What do you mean by leading these people to this place?" the Ranger thundered. "Don't you know it's your duty to protect the Government's property?"

Kunji Nair did not answer.

At that moment, the old man's attention was diverted by a red glow that came from their own quarters.

Simultaneously, June saw it.

"Dad, someone has set fire to our house" she gasped, and started towards the glare.

But Neville Gardner stopped her. "Don't go", he called quickly, "it's only a ruse to draw us away from here. This godown is their real objective. "It may also be a move to separate us", he went on hurriedly. "If we are together when they attack, we can stop them. Doesn't matter about our house but we dare not move from here".

No doubt her father was right and had seen through the clever maneuver in time.

The glare grew brighter and spread into the open sky. The reflection danced eerily against the dense phalanx of encircling trees.

At that moment, from the darkness ahead a voice barked the command, "Fire"

They heard a ragged Volley of rifle-shots and then there was silence except for the crackling of the flames and the popping sounds that came as the sparks showered heavenwards.

The police had come to their rescue!

They had seen the glare of the flames from half-a - mile away. Ted had halted the jeep a furlong distant and advanced with his policemen. In the flickering firelight, he had observed the figures of the rebels as they moved to and fro, starting fresh conflagrations and on his own responsibility had opened fire on them.

June and the two Guards ran to the burning bungalow, while

Gardner followed with his three prisoners. There they were joined by John Greystone, the D.S.P., and the policemen.

Between them they managed to throw out such of the Gardners' belongings as had not yet been consumed. There were no fire-extinguishers or other appliances to meet such an emergency. What water had been stored for the personal use of the Range Officer and June was now sloshed upon the flames, while three policemen feverishly drew more from the well nearby, a bucket at a time. As soon as this reached the top it was emptied into their zinc bathtub which had been retrieved from the bathroom, and thrown over the flames together with sand, scraped from the ground in handfuls.

By these primitive methods, the fire was eventually brought under control, but not before half of the Gardners' quarters had been gutted.

John went up to June and asked, "Are you alright, June?", and to her father, "and you, too, Mr. Gardner?"

With a little thrill of pleasure, she realised that he had addressed her for the first time by her Christian name. But perhaps he didn't mean anything by it. He was excited and just blurted out the first words that came to his mind.

With a smile the Range Officer replied, "We're okay. Thank you and Mr. Baker for coming to our-rescue".

Everyone had been too busy to worry about the arsonists and it was assumed they had fled when the police had fired on them. Apparently, nobody had been hit.

Kunji Nair made a clean breast of matters, and state that Chacko had sent a messenger three days; earlier to him, asking him to assist by leading the incendiaries to the sandalwood storeroom. He admitted that he had later been asked to help in murdering old Gardner and abducting his daughter. But this plan had apparently not come from the Party members themselves, Kunji Nair thought. From the manner in which Chacko had drawn him aside and told it to him, he gained the impression that it was the leader's own scheme.

He owned up to having been promised promotion when the British were ousted, but for his assistance in the murder of the

Range Officer and the kidnapping of June,

Chacko had offered him a hundred rupees. The Inspector, who had accompanied the party of armed policemen in the van, meticulously recorded all Kunji Nair's statements. He was placed under arrest together with the two men who had accompanied him, and hustled inside the Maria to be taken to Nilambur for further questioning.

Chapter 24
Ruth Has an Idea

After the incidents at the Forest Chowki the situation quietened down for the next few days, although the atmosphere was charged with foreboding. Where the next blow would fall; whom it would strike; was anybody's guess.

Forces of evil were abroad and threatened everywhere. The rebel leaders had gone underground but would reappear and cause another outbreak at any time.

And over all, lay the shadow of the man-eater!

Ted Baker made two visits to Neville Gardner's little bungalow or rather the unburnt half of it which he and June were now occupying as part of his official inspection duty. More frequently he visited the Greystone home, ostensibly to see that everything was safe and to have a chat with the planter.

At least, that was the reason he tried to make himself think was his purpose in going there. Deep down inside, he knew he was lying. He tried to shelve the thought; he tried not to admit it. But in his saner moments, when he caught up with himself, he knew he was going for the sake of Ruth Greystone.

He asked himself if he was falling in love with her. He thought frankly about the answer to that question.

But he could not come up with an honest reply. Was he in love with Ruth? Or only with her body?

John Greystone and Chicka had tethered a heifer as bait on the bed of the Karadi Arr below a suitable tree on which a machan could be built if occasion arose. Another they had tied half-way up the hill, in line with the cave that the little man had found, and near a rock where John could later hide himself and try to shoot the tigress.

That Wednesday morning, he had gone to inspect the baits by himself, and Ruth was alone, when Ted Baker called in his car at about 10 o'clock.

By this time both Ruth and the policeman had come to

acknowledge their feelings towards each other.

She welcomed him beneath the portico as he alighted.

"Darling, I'm glad to see you. We shall be alone at least for a couple of hours as John has gone; to check on his baits".

Ted followed her into the drawing-room and sat himself on the edge of the wide sofa. He appeared to be nervous and ill at ease.

"Come, have a drink" Ruth offered, "a whisky?"

"Not today thank you. I don't feel like it", he replied. Hesitating awhile, he added, "To be perfectly candid, I'm worried about ourselves".

"Worried? Whatever about?" she inquired in surprise, with a little ripple of laughter, "Do tell me. What's upsetting you?"

"Well", he rejoined, choosing his words carefully "it's like this. You know how matters have turned out between us. The point is; what are we going to do about it?"

"Do about what?" asked Ruth.

Ted shuffled his feet and scratched the side of his nose with annoyance. Why is this woman being so difficult, he thought; or is she just plain dense? Surely she knows what I am driving at. She can't possibly be that stupid. He tried to explain himself.

"You know quite well what I mean. Are we being fair to John? It's quite evident that he trusts you and me implicitly. In face of that, it seems a very caddish thing for us to deceive him in this manner. I can hardly look him in the face".

Then he dropped his voice to the merest whisper as he leaned towards her and said, "I'm certain that servant of yours knows everything. He may have seen us on some occasion. I have caught him looking at you once or twice, and believe me, if looks could kill, you would have dropped dead long ago.

"Why does he hate you so much, Ruth?"

"I'm sure I don't know", she replied lightly, "perhaps the beast hates me just because I hate him. He has made no secret whatever about loathing white people. Why, he once openly said so, although I must admit he appears to have a deep regard, if not affection, for John".

"Another thing I can't stand is his perfectly ghastly habit of appearing and disappearing from nowhere. It gets on my nerves and frightens me".

"Anyhow, there it is Ruth. If you know he hates you as much as you say he does, while I feel he watches us closely and has often seen us, what's there to prevent him whispering a word to John? I wouldn't like him to find out. To say we're letting him down is to put it mildly".

Ruth was growing impatient, "Don't say you're getting cold feet, Ted?" she asked caustically.

Baker looked up quickly, his face a dull brick-red. He was vexed.

"It's not a matter of cold feet. I wish you wouldn't speak so thoughtlessly", he said ill-temperedly, "it's a matter of playing the game as one man to another".

Ruth recognised in time that she had made a faux pas by trying to scoff at him. Ted was the sort of person who did not like to be pushed, far less ridiculed. He must be won over by other means and methods.

Ruth was an adept at using these other approaches. She had often employed them on him in the past, and she had always succeeded.

"Let's not talk about it any longer, darling", she said, changing her tactics, "here, do have a drink and we'll speak of something else".

"Not for me, thanks", Ted replied stubbornly, still ruffled. And then, "I really don't know what there is to talk about".

Sensing that it might displease him, Ruth did not take a drink herself. Instead, she moved closer to him on the sofa.

"I think I understand you", she said reconcilingly. "We have come to mean such a lot to each other that I for one, just cannot forget you because of John. But I could very easily forget John—for you", she whispered.

Ted was silent. Then he asked earnestly, "Do you really mean that, or are you saying it to flatter me?"

"Of course, I mean it", she answered.

The Superintendent did not reply but continued to stare moodily at the carpet.

Slowly, Ruth rested her head upon his shoulder. She reached out with her hand and toyed with his fingers. The closeness of her body seemed to break down the resistance he was trying hard to build up against this lovely creature who was dragging him to perdition.

Ted looked down at her raven black hair and drew his right arm around her shoulder. Conscious of his glance, Ruth raised her eyes to meet his. He read the message of invitation in their smouldering depths. She in turn observed the coldness of resolution die in his blue eyes and drew her face up to his. As she did so she carried his left hand that was twice the size of hers, and placed his palm against her thigh, above the knee slightly parting her legs to help his fingers which now began to grope questioningly.

Ted bent his head to kiss her throat and Ruth nestled the lovely soft hummock of her breast against his cheek as if she was giving him some gift. She pulled his right hand over her shoulder and with her fingers closed it around her right breast, covered it with her own, and squeezed tightly.

In a sudden gust of passion, Ted crushed the tender flesh mercilessly and commenced to twist it with sadistic delight.

Tears came into Ruth's eyes as she ejaculated, "Ah! You're hurting!" But in those tears was the light of unbridled passion and ecstasy.

With a moan of frenzy, she threw herself upon him and forced him back beneath her on the sofa.

In time, Ted remembered where he was.

Releasing her, with both hands he pushed her back firmly, while in a voice almost sobbing with the intensity of his craving he gasped, "Dearest, not here, in the open like this again. Suppose the servant sees us?"

With a great effort, Ruth controlled herself. Trembling violently, she sat back in her place next to him, her breathing heavy and audible.

"I must, Ted, I must", she urged in a low, husky voice, "please

don't deny me. I don't care who sees us or what happens now. I want it. Please. Please".

With an effort, Ted struggled to an upright position on the sofa, pushing her aside. He had brought his emotions under restraint. In a level voice, completely himself now, he said, "Not in the bungalow, Ruth. We must meet somewhere else".

There was frustration in her eyes as she fought to overcome her desire.

She asked, "Let me come to Nilambur, then. I'll tell John I'm not feeling well and want to see a doctor. He cannot refuse as there's no doctor here. It may take a few days to persuade him. He won't want to, leave the estate at a time like this and come with me. I'll pretend to be disappointed but will tell him I'll go alone. On some pretext, I'll stay the night at Nilambur. Then...." and her voice trailed off into husky anticipation.

"Yes, do that dear", Ted acquiesced, "I'll reserve a room for you at the *Moosafarkhana* (Traveler's Bungalow). It will be quite private there as it's seldom used and nobody will know if I visit you at night".

To seal the bargain of their tryst, Ted bent forward and kissed her again.

The next moment they sat back hurriedly. Chandra had entered the room and stood to one side. His dark eyes were fathomless as he looked at Ted and Ruth alternatively, but his mouth curled in derision - or maybe it was just contempt.

"Does madam want…" he began.

Ruth interrupted him irritably, "Damn it, why don't you knock on the door before you barge into a room where people are talking?"

"So sorry, madam. Won't do again", Chandra apologised as he turned to walk away. Then he stopped and looked over his shoulder. One eyebrow was raised superciliously when he said, "I didn't know you and Superintendent *Sahib* were…talking". There was a significant pause before the last word. Chandra went on, "I promise this last time. No happen again, madam; no, never! This very last time!"

And with that he left the room.

Ted jumped to his feet, his face scarlet with suppressed fury. "Damned impertinent devil" he rasped to Ruth, "did you notice how he hesitated before saying the word 'talking'? And he kept repeating it would never happen again. I wonder what he meant by that? If he intended it as an apology, he certainly made it sound like a threat".

Ruth remained seated but raised her hand to grip his arm restrainingly. "That dreadful man, appearing and vanishing like a shadow, positively gives me the creeps I've complained to John so often but he says it's merely the bearer's habit and takes no notice of what I say".

"He's got us under his thumb now in right earnest", Ted growled morosely. "He caught us kissing and I've a strong feeling he was watching the other day when we were....", and his voice trailed into silence. ”He may even try blackmail", the D.S.P. went on, "by threatening to tell John. I wonder if heard what we were saying just now about meeting at Nilambur?"

Ruth shrugged her shoulders. "I don't think so", she answered. "He probably came into the room in his usual silent fashion and caught us by mere accident”.

“Oh”, and here she looked at Ted inquiringly, “do you really think he saw us the other day on the sofa? What makes you say that? You never mentioned it before"?

"Perhaps I'm wrong", Ted conceded, "I sincerely hope so; but I had a sensation towards the end that we were being watched".

He turned to stoop and pick up his helmet from the floor. "I'll go along now, darling, before John returns. Perhaps it’s better that he doesn't see us alone together too often. He may begin to get ideas. Do the best you can, and if you succeed in coming to Nilambur, I'll make the reservation at the moosafarkhana as soon as I know you've arrived”.

"And you had better visit one of the doctors in town, even if you don't take his medicine". Ted smiled significantly, adding in a bantering tone, "As a good policeman, you see, I can also advise you how to cover your tracks".

Ruth walked with him to the verandah where he turned

around for a moment, tweaked her chin, and then strode down the steps to his Buick.

As he reached the car, the D.S.P. stopped abruptly.

Turning to her, he asked, "Are you sure you could forget John for me?"

"Quite sure, dearest. I meant what I said".

He did not answer but waved to her before driving rapidly away. Ruth watched the car grow smaller and smaller with half-closed eyes, her thoughts racing ahead in anticipation of what was soon to happen at Nilambur.

Chapter 25
And Complains of a Headache

Greystone entered the compound of his bungalow where the silver-oak trees shading the coffee bushes ended and the open area of garden began. It was nearing 12:45 in the afternoon. The sun was scorching and the air throbbed with heat.

The figure that had been hiding among the coffee shrubs detached itself and approached him. The man talked long and seriously to John. To anyone who was near enough to see without being sufficiently close to hear, it would appear that both men were in deadly earnest.

Over the face of the listener passed several changing emotions. The first was disbelief, mingled with resentment against the speaker. As the man went on and seemed to establish his veracity, other expressions crossed Greystone's handsome countenance.

Came incredulous surprise followed by pained shock. Then the light of indignant anger. Finally, a look of cold fury and hunger for revenge. Last of all was an expression difficult to comprehend. It appeared one of deep cunning and extreme cruelty. Whatever it was that the man had told him, one fact was certain. John Greystone had not liked hearing it. It had upset him terribly.

"I would never have thought it", he said softly to himself, and then aloud, "Thank you for telling me". The man vanished into the coffee from whence he had come.

When John entered the bungalow, it was past 1 o'clock, and even inside the building the air was oppressive' still. His khaki shirt showed two dark patches of perspiration under the armpits and another between the shoulder-blades, where it clung to him. Sweat ran down both cheeks and forehead as he removed his solar topee. His hair was dank with it and he brought a musty smell of body odour into the room.

"Phew! It's blasted hot!" he ejaculated, "I'm sweating like a pig and can't sit down to lunch in this state. I think I'll take a cold shower first. Have you eaten, Ruth?"

His wife was lying on the sofa. That was her usual place. But this time there was a difference. A handkerchief lay across her forehead and covered both eyes. It was saturated with eau-de-cologne and the scent hung heavily in that close atmosphere.

In a dull voice, she muttered, "I don't want lunch, John. I've got a splitting headache".

Her husband crossed over to the sofa solicitously and laid the back of his right hand against one of her cheeks. No; her skin was quite cool. She didn't appear to have any fever. To check his diagnosis, John picked up Ruth's hand and felt her pulse.

She certainly had no fever.

"How are the bowels?" he asked. "Free?"

Without moving her head or taking the wet cloth away, Ruth answered, "Yes".

"Did you eat anything out of the way? Anything indigestible?" he inquired.

"No" she answered in a low voice, "I ate only what you ate, both for dinner last night and breakfast this morning".

"Perhaps it's the weather. I'll make you a dose of Liver Salts", he offered. "Half an hour later, swallow two Aspro tablets with a cup of hot tea. That'll do the trick. You'll be okay by evening".

He went to the pantry where the medicines were kept to mix the Salts. As his footfalls faded, a mocking smile flitted across Ruth's countenance.

Was it a strange coincidence that while he was busy in the pantry, John also wore a similar smirk?

In spite of the salts and the Aspros and the hot tea, Ruth's headache did not abate one bit. She ate nothing for lunch or tea in the evening and instead of dinner, she drank a tumbler-full of warm Ovaltine.

Half the night she kept John awake, moaning in a low tone and complaining about her headache. "I'm sure it's due to my eyes" she muttered, "I must have them tested".

A little later she had an idea. "Perhaps it's not my eyes at all, John. Maybe I'm coming in for a tumour".

At 3 o'clock Ruth was still restless. "John" she called from the depths of her pillow, "I remember reading somewhere that typhoid fever begins with an in tolerable headache. I wonder if I'm coming in for that".

Her husband appeared strangely unsympathetic.

"As likely as not this headache is the forerunner of a bout of malaria", she said later.

Greystone merely grunted.

Ruth could act passably well when she had some purpose in view and felt it was worth the trouble. And this time she certainly had one.

The following morning, she said, "I've still got this headache. It's so severe and extends from my right eye and temple to the top of my head. It's no better than yesterday; if anything, worse".

She was not well enough to sit with her husband at the breakfast table and again when he came home in the jeep for lunch. Nor did she eat anything. Chandra served tea and heard her saying, "John dear; if this headache does not get better by tonight, please let me have the jeep tomorrow morning I'll go down to Nilambur and have myself attended to, even if it means' staying over a day or two.

"But don't worry about me, my dear. I know you can't leave the plantation just now. I'll be alright by the time I return".

John Greystone felt happy at hearing those words. He had been wondering how to avoid accompanying her. Such a trip would not at all fall in with the plan that had come to his mind. He was glad Ruth had solved the problem for him.

"Do you think you will be fit enough to drive the jeep all that way?" he asked.

"Oh yes", she told him, "perhaps the fresh air and the concentration of driving will keep my mind off the wretched headache. I'm sure my eyes are to blame”

"But you won't be able to get glasses in less than a week", he reminded her. "The doctor may have to send down to Calicut for the lenses".

Ruth saw her chance and took it. "If it comes to that, I'll go to

Calicut myself. Or remain a few days at Nilambur till the lenses arrive". After a moment, she added, "Of course I shall do my best to hurry back to you".

"I know you will", John said enigmatically.

They left it at that.

Towards evening Ruth complained, "Its growing worse and spreading. I feel spasmodic pains all over. They come and go, but are not like the steady pain that racks the right side of my head so terribly. Maybe it is just nerve sympathy".

She ate no dinner again but drank Ovaltine and smoked half a packet of Capstans, the two Aspros, washed down with brandy and soda did not relieve her much.

As he was serving the coffee, Chandra could not help overhearing his master saying, "Yes darling, your condition cannot be neglected any longer. Are you sure you would not like me to drive you down to Nilambur tomorrow?" And he heard Ruth reply,

"Certainly not at a time like this, John. Why, the idea is preposterous. You can't leave just now. I'll go alone and will be alright. But don't be worried if I'm delayed a little. The doctor may want me to remain a day or two".

Into Chandra's eyes sprang a gleam of thoughtful cunning as an idea slowly formed itself in his mind.

Chapter 26
The Figure in the Gloom

It was pitch black outside the Greystone residence, for the time was 2:30 a.m. and it was a cloudy, moonless night. The darkness was accentuated by the squat silhouette of the building on one side and the tall, silver-oak trees on the other.

The hazy figure that seemed to materialize from the rear of the bungalow was hardly visible in that gloom. It was impossible to say whether the form was that of a white man or a native. There was nothing distinguishable about it. The individual appeared to be dressed in a shirt and long trousers. He made no noise as he walked towards the garage. It was difficult to know whether he was barefooted or wore light, rubber-soled shoes.

Arriving at the door, the man halted for a brief moment while he groped in his trouser pocket. Then he withdrew something in his hand. Silently he fitted it into the lock and turned the levers. It opened almost immediately.

The man looked around to make sure he was not being observed. No living thing moved. He drew the door sufficiently wide to slip through and closed it behind him.

Whoever the prowler was, he certainly had a fixed purpose in mind and knew what he was going to do. From his pocket, he drew a small electric torch and pressed the button, following the beam of light towards the front of the vehicle till he stood before the radiator. There he stopped and dropped on one knee, while pushing the switch-button of the torch to its second position so that it would remain burning. The unknown directed the ray of light that cut through the darkness squarely on to the bolt and nut that coupled the twin tie-rods that led to the front, wheels.

From each of his trouser pockets, where he had kept them separately to prevent them knocking against one another and making a noise, the man now drew a pair of cutting-pliers and an adjustable wrench. From the belt of his trousers he pulled out a short screw-driver. With these three tools the prowler set to work methodically.

First, he removed the split-pin that prevented the big nut

from working loose. Next, he slackened the nut itself with the wrench and kept on loosening till it came off altogether. He replaced this nut with his fingers, revolving it slowly and carefully to the right, one half-turn at a time.

The unknown counted four such half-turns and stopped. Now the nut was only holding by two threads. He dropped the split-pin into his shirt pocket and put back the tools as he had brought them.

Then the man bent once more to retrieve the torch which had been burning all this while, from the ground where he had left it, slipping the button to the "off" position. The interior of the garage was again plunged into blackness.

Allowing a full minute to pass to accustom his eyes to the darkness after the glare of the torch-beam, the man moved silently to the door, opened it a few inches and peered outside. Finding the coast clear, he stepped quickly out and hastily closed the door behind him, pressing the spring lock on to the staple.

Finally, he groped inside his shirt pocket, found the split-pin, and hurled it as far as he could into the long grass to the left. He put the torch back into that pocket.

There was a grim look on his face as the figure furtively retraced his steps towards the rear of the bungalow and disappeared from sight.

Chapter 27
Accident or Murder?

It was early morning as John and Ruth walked to the garage. Drops of dew glistened on the soaked grass like split diamonds scattered by some lavish hand.

John opened the lock with the key he took from his trouser pocket and swung both doors apart. Getting into the driver's seat of the jeep, he pressed the self-starter and allowed the engine to idle a few minutes to warm it up. Then he slowly backed the vehicle out and turned it around in a half-circle to face the front of the bungalow.

"Aren't you taking some things with you, Ruth, in case you stop over a day or two?" he inquired.

Ruth looked up sharply. She was certain she detected a note of sarcasm in his question. Then she decided her guilty conscience was making her unduly sensitive. Undoubtedly the query was prompted by feelings of solicitude.

"Oh yes, John", she replied quickly, "I kept them packed last night in my valise. I shall bring it now". Then she realised her mistake.

"You've not told me how your headache is", her husband remarked, "the fact that you packed last night makes me conclude it's no better, eh? How do you feel?"

Again, Ruth glanced at him overtly. She could kick herself! Yes, she had blundered badly by packing the night before. That would indicate to anybody even the densest nit-wit that she had already made up her mind to go to Nilambur whether her headache was better or not.

She tried to cover up by saying, "It was bad enough all yesterday, darling. I rather anticipated it might be worse this morning and took the precaution of packing in case the headache became too severe to let me think what I wanted to carry with me. As a matter of fact, it's pretty awful".

"I see, dear", her husband replied, adding, "I'm sorry to hear that and hope it won't prevent you from driving. Do be careful.

There are some very nasty bends in the first ten miles of gradient. The road is not buttressed and there are deep ravines and nullahs on both sides."

Ruth hardly had the patience to listen to his advice. She turned and went inside the house.

John gazed thoughtfully at the jeep. He walked up to it, gripped the steering-wheel, and jerked it sharply to the right and left to test the mechanism. The front wheels appeared to respond quite normally. He moved it two or three times more, roughly, irritably.

Ruth returned, carrying the valise. John took it from her and put it on the floor at the rear of the jeep. He kissed her; and Ruth kissed him in return.

Then she got in and started the engine.

John called, "Goodbye darling; do be careful. And come back soon quite cured of your headache. I shall be waiting for you".

Ruth said something he could not catch due to the roar of the exhaust. He waved to her as the jeep moved forward in first gear, whining audibly till she changed it to second as she drove up the incline leading to the main road and over the hill.

John watched till it disappeared from sight among the trees. He could still hear the hum of the engine for some time after that. The planter looked worried as he turned to enter the bungalow, but soon that expression gave way to one of utter relief.

Chandra's eyes had followed the departing vehicle too, and there was hate and exultation in them.

Ruth put the jeep into top gear and pressed the accelerator further down. She knew it was only by maintaining a reasonably high speed that she could give the motor enough momentum to climb the gradient. Otherwise she would have to change down into second gear for most of the way.

She covered the first five miles that led to the lowest of the nine hair-pin bends that would take her to the top of the '*ghat* '. Thereafter, the gradient would be slight for the remainder of the journey. Soon she would be at Nilambur and, she hoped, in Ted Baker's arms.

Ruth swung the steering-wheel sharply to the left to negotiate the first bend. The jeep took it nicely, but lost impetus and she was compelled to change down to second gear as she wrenched the steering in the opposite direction to take the next bend. Immediately after that turning she pressed the accelerator flat to the floor-board. The engine gradually picked up speed, allowing her to put the vehicle back into top gear.

Once again, she swung hard to the left for the third curve. The jeep took the turn with a slight skid While Ruth kept it in top gear as she approached the fourth bend. Swinging alternately to left and right she passed the seventh hairpin bend and came to a comparatively flat stretch of roadway that led for some distance till it rose steeply at the eighth bend. This was the sharpest of them all and the gradient the steepest. Here she had to make a close turn to the right.

The jeep approached the curve and Ruth kept her foot hard down on the accelerator pedal as she twirled the steering wheel. But this time the vehicle did not respond. Instead of turning to the right it continued going directly forward.

Suddenly the driver realised that something had gone radically wrong with the mechanism. Abruptly she removed her foot from the accelerator and jammed it down on the brake pedal.

But it was too late.

She had been driving far too, fast to be able to stop in the short distance provided by the narrow roadway. Before the brakes could perceptibly slow the vehicle down it shot across the road and burst through the bushes growing on the left bank.

Without warning Ruth suddenly saw empty space and trees far below when the engine, being the heaviest part of the jeep, dropped forward and downwards and the rear wheels spun ludicrously in the air as it dived to the bottom of the valley three hundred feet below.

She screamed loudly twice, and her third scream choked to abrupt silence when the vehicle struck the ground, bounced upwards, somersaulted and came to rest with another resounding crash.

Orange-coloured dust in a choking cloud enveloped

everything, hiding the wreck from view. Crackling noises broke the brief silence that followed, growing momentarily louder as flames licked hungrily at the twisted metal. The petrol from the inverted tank had caught fire.

An hour later, maybe longer, came a faint jingling sound. Two bullock-carts came into view, the bells tinkling merrily on the necks of the oxen that hauled them. They were going downhill and in the opposite direction to which the jeep had been travelling.

Thus, it came about that the drivers noticed the spot where something large had broken through the hedging bordering the roadway.

The men got out and each of them placed stones in front of the wheels of his cart to ensure the bulls did not run away with it. Then they went to investigate. They saw tyre marks in the dust and knew it was a motorcar of some sort that had leaped to its doom. Pushing through the smashed bushes they stood on the edge of the ridge.

Far below in the valley smouldered the charred remains of the jeep. Quickly they scrambled down to the wreck. The metal was twisted from the heat of the fire that had by now completely burnt itself out, but they could still identify the vehicle as a jeep.

And that was when they found Ruth's body, contorted and broken and almost charred beyond recognition. She had dressed herself in jeans and shirt so that at first the cartmen thought they were gazing at the remains of a man. Most of her clothing and flesh had been burnt to cinders but the long hair still adhered to her skull. Part of the skin of the face and some on the torso and one thigh, although terribly blistered and raw, showed in patches.

Over all hung the stench of semi-cooked, toasted meat. The cart-men were regular travelers along that stretch of roadway. Many times, before had they seen the jeep with the planter and his wife.

One of them said to the other, "Greystone *dorai* has been killed".

But his companion replied, "It's his jeep alright but not his body. This is a woman's. Are you so stupid that you cannot recognise a female body when you see one? Look at the long hair.

Does a white *dorai* grow such long hair? And look there. Although the skin has peeled off, cannot you recognise a woman's breast when you see one? Look at the thigh. A man does not have such a graceful, hairless thigh.

"No, it's not the *dorai's* body, my friend. It's the body of a *doraisani* (a lady). Probably his wife. She must have tried to drive the motorcar without properly understanding how to do so. That's why she went over the cliff. There's no other body here, so she must have been alone".

"You are right, Gopal", answered the first man, "now I can see it's a woman. Of course, you would be the one to spot that, being the womaniser that you are. I have no doubt if a body was buried for six months and thoroughly decomposed, you would still be able to tell if it had belonged to a woman. You're ahead of me in that way. Let's go and break the news to the *dorai* . We shall be passing near his bungalow. He may reward us with a baksheesh".

They clambered up the incline to the road, removed the stones from the wheels of their carts, and hastened to bring tidings of the gruesome discovery they had made.

Greystone was seated in the cane chair on his verandah when the cart-drivers presented themselves.

The elder of the two, the man named Gopal, said blandly, "The *dorai's* jeep has met with an accident and fallen down a *khud* . It has been burnt up, together with the *doraisani* ".

"Good God!" John exclaimed, springing to his feet, "What's that you say?"

The cart-man repeated himself, and this time the younger man joined in to explain how they had come to notice there had been an accident.

For a moment, John was at a loss for words. Then he almost shouted the question, "Are you certain the *doraisani* is dead? She may be only injured?"

"She's quite dead alright; there's hardly anything left of her".

John asked, "Where did this happen?"

“About seven miles away", answered the older man "at the second bend coming down the *ghat* ".

"Chandra!" yelled John urgently.

The bearer appeared.

"Come with me. These cart-men say the jeep has met with an accident and madam has been killed. We shall have to walk".

Greystone set off up the road, walking so fast that he all but ran while Chandra followed close behind. They were covered with perspiration when they arrived at the scene of the accident.

John scrambled down the slope with Chandra. Then he came to a halt as he gazed at what had been his wife a few hours earlier. He seemed too stunned to say anything and looked dumbly before him.

Not so Chandra, however. Without a second glance at the remains of his late mistress, he walked forward to examine what was left of the jeep. It rested at the bottom of the deep ravine, all four wheels in the air.

After some moments, he called softly to his master, speaking, in his excitement, in broken English instead of in Hindustani.

"*Sahib* , this iron pieces come off. Maybe madam not able to control". Then he added enigmatically, Perhaps this hand of God and Kismet or maybe hand of man".

“What the hell do you mean?" John practically yelled.

Chandra pointed with the index finger of his right hand to the loose tie-rods. He added, "Something gone wrong with turning *bundobast* , *sahib* . Should iron pieces always loose that way? They should fit tight, no?"

John stepped forward quickly to look at the tie-rods. The bolt and nut in the centre had come off!

The servant's words rushed through his mind. What had made Chandra notice this so soon?

“Good heavens!" was all he muttered.

The eyes of the two men met involuntarily. In that glance, each knew what the other was thinking. It was no accident.

Murder had been committed!

John broke the silence. "Stay here a moment, Chandra. I'll be

back soon".

"I know where you are going, *sahib* ", the bearer returned blandly, "to look for missing things. I come with you. My eyes better than yours".

They climbed back to the road and started walking downhill together. John searched one side and Chandra; the other.

It was the servant who found the nut a little below the fatal hairpin bend. He did not touch it, but called urgently to his master, "Come *sahib* ; here nut".

John thought; why did Chandra not pick it up?

Perhaps he wanted me to see that the nut was indeed lying in the middle of the roadway!

Greystone took the nut in his right hand, studied it for a moment, and thrust it into the pocket of the khaki pants he was wearing.

Just then Chandra darted to the drain by the roadside and retrieved something else which he also handed to John. It was the missing bolt. The planter pill it into his pocket with the nut.

"Go down again and stay with madam's body", he said, "I'll walk the remaining four miles to where this road meets the other from the Forest Chowki. I'll catch the bus to Nilambur there and report this matter to the D.S.P. *sahib* ".

"I obey, sir", replied Chandra, this time in Hindustani, and turned abruptly to retrace his steps and slither down the loose gravel to the bottom of the valley.

About twenty-five yards short of the wreckage he stopped, climbed on to a low boulder and sat on it, his knees hunched before him with his chin resting on them.

In that position he stared placidly at what was left of the dead woman, and as he gazed the sun grew hotter and first one ant and a single fly, and then more ants and more flies, discovered the remains. The latter began to buzz around in swarms and settle on the body.

But Chandra did nothing.

What had at first been a speck overhead grew larger a king-

vulture, spotting death from the great height at which he was flying, started to drop towards the feast. The vulture was followed by others. They settled on the ground in a circle, craned their grotesque, naked, fleshy necks and looked suspiciously at the half-burnt remains.

They had seen death before in many of its forms-from old age, sickness and violence. But they had never seen death where the dreaded flames had earlier played a part. So, they hesitated awhile.

Still Chandra did nothing about it.

Then the king-vulture, perhaps by virtue of being the first to discover this corpse, ungainly hopped a few paces forward and made a peck at the cadaver out of curiosity.

This time Chandra did something. He threw a small stone.

It bounced across the rock and alarmed the king vulture, which turned and hopped back to rejoin the other scavengers. The birds looked reproachfully at the stone thrower.

"Foul bird", Chandra muttered as if to himself, “foul as you are, do not partake of a repast that is far more foul than even you".

Deterred from picking at the dead body, the vultures did not fly away. They maintained their circle while looking alternately at Ruth's remains and at Chandra, if awaiting his permission to begin their gruesome feast.

But the ants and the flies covered the corpse and Chandra did nothing about them.

John waited half-an-hour at the crossroads before the bus turned up. It was an old Chevrolet, battered and held together by numerous welds and joints. The driver halted for him to clamber aboard. The already tightly-packed passengers huddled yet more closely together to make room and the vehicle continued its lumbering journey.

It took nearly two hours to cover those 34 miles to Nilambur.

Ted noticed John's haggard appearance and sweat-sodden clothes and guessed he brought some bad news.

"Glad to see you, John", he began, and then, "Any trouble? You look done in".

"Ruth's dead!" the planter announced, "killed in an accident to the jeep".

"O Christ!" ejaculated the D.S.P., his face draining to a deathly white while he swayed visibly. "Dead, did you say?" he repeated incredulously, "Dead! O Christ! It can't be"

There was not the slightest doubt that between Ruth and this man had been feelings of more than mere friendship.

John felt glad that she was dead.

"How did it happen?" Ted was asking.

The trace of a sardonic smile touched the corners of the planter's mouth. He said, "She complained of a headache for the last two days and asked me to let her use the jeep to come here to see a doctor. She left early this morning".

"Where did it happen?" interrupted the Superintendent.

"At the eighth hair-pin bend, nearly seven miles from the bungalow".

"What caused the accident?"

"I was coming to that", John replied, "While I was looking at Ruth's body Chandra, who had come with me to the spot, examined the wreck. The tie-bars were loose. The nut holding them had come off. As matter of fact we searched for the nut and Chandra found it, lying in the middle of the road a short distance before the spot where the jeep went over into a deep ravine. The bolt had rolled into the gutter".

"Here they are", he added, handing Ted the bolt nut from his pocket."

"Good heavens!" Baker exclaimed, "Do you really think the accident was caused by this nut falling off?"

"Without a doubt", Greystone affirmed flatly, "but whether it just worked loose and fell off, or was deliberately made loose by someone with the intention that it should fall off, is for you to find out. As a matter of fact, Chandra said just that, together with pome remark about the accident being the will of Kismet or some such thing. Unfortunately, Ruth did not like him and often showed it, and I know he did not like her in return".

"Yes, I know that", Ted agreed.

"How did you know that?" John asked. The question was icily sharp.

“I…I just sort of noticed it", lied the D.S.P., lamely. Then he asked, "Where's the servant now?"

“I left him there while I came by bus to report the matter to you", Greystone explained.

The Superintendent appeared to regain control of himself and had become the police official in charge an inquiry into a possible murder. "I see", he returned, and raising his head towards the door shouted "Sentry! Call the Inspector *Sahib* quickly".

The Inspector came and Baker said, "Summon the ambulance and ask a doctor to come, too. There's an accident and Mrs. Greystone has been killed".

A little later, with John seated next to him, he headed the Buick towards the scene of the disaster. The ambulance with the doctor, the Inspector and two stretcher-bearers.

Neither Ted nor John spoke to one another, for; each was absorbed in his own thoughts.

When the Buick and the ambulance arrived at the; fateful curve their occupants looked down the bank and saw Chandra seated on a rock above the wreckage. But only when they descended did the king-vulture and his companions waddle a few steps before flapping heavily away in all directions.

Chandra rose to greet them.

Then they noticed the ants and the flies. John said to him bitterly, "What the devil does this mean? Could you not have driven off the flies at least?"

"It's against my caste to touch dead body, *sahib* ", answered Chandra stoically in English, apparently for Ted to hear.

The doctor and the stretcher-bearers lifted what remained of Ruth on to the stretcher and then struggled up the hill with their burden. Ted left the Inspector at the spot, promising to send policemen from Nilambur to relieve him soon.

When he got back to his office, the D.S.P. locked himself

inside.

He was thinking. She told me she would come to Nilambur but expected it would take some days to get John's consent. I never thought for a moment he would agree at all. Strange he raised no objection! His attitude was queer when he spoke to me. Did Chandra overhear our plan? Did he tell?

Chapter 28

The Devil-Tigress Found Me—Before I Saw Her

It was a fortnight since Ruth had been killed. There had been an inquest as a matter of formality and the doctor had pronounced a verdict of death from multiple injuries and burning by fire due to accident.

Greystone tried hard to carry on with his work.

Neville Gardner and June visited him once to express their condolences. Both of them noticed the change in his appearance, although it required the womanly intuition in June to delve deeper and know that John was very worried over something. She thought there was an expression of fear in his countenance.

A few days later the D.S.P. called on the Gardners', saying he had come to inquire if there had been any fresh incidents or signs of trouble with the Forest Department subordinates. He also asked a lot of questions. Had they noticed anything unusual about the behaviour of John and Ruth towards each other lately? Were they in the habit of quarrelling?

Ted was disappointed if he had expected to unearth any information. But the nature of the questions indicated to June that the police officer knew the relationship between John Greystone and his wife had been far from happy.

This caused her to think. Had there been another man in the picture? If so, who could he be? She knew that the D.S.P. himself used to go there very often.

June pondered. Was the Police Officer that man? Had John come to find out that his wife was unfaithful to him?

Had he killed her?

Everyone said the accident was caused by a nut falling off from some part of the steering mechanism. But had it really fallen off; or been made to fall off?

She began to feel very worried herself.

While all this was going on, Greystone almost forgot about the man-eater.

But the Karumba, Chicka, did not. Every day he ranged the jungle and the Karadi Arr to find out if he could, by her pug-marks, whether the tigress still hung about near the stream and yet lived in the cave he had discovered.

And so, early one morning, it happened that he came upon her fresh spoor. She had come down the hill, crossed the wet sands of the Karadi Arr, and walked up a tributary that converged on the eastern bank of the rivulet. On an impulse, Chicka decided to follow these pug-marks to see where they led.

Although completely dry, the bed of the tributary was sandy, and this showed the tigress' trail clearly, Chicka followed very cautiously, alert for the slightest signs of danger. After covering some distance, he noticed that the form of the tracks he was following had abruptly changed.

Up to this point the tigress had been strolling aimlessly along. She had left the imprints of all four of her feet in the wet sands of the main stream and on the dry bed of the tributary.

Suddenly the pug-marks of apparently only two feet showed themselves, and not all four feet as before. To a novice, if he noticed it at all, this change would be inexplicable. To an experienced tracker like Chicka it meant only one thing. The tigress was now placing her hind-feet, at each step forward she took, on exactly the same spot her corresponding fore-foot, both on the right and left side, had just vacated.

She would do that for only one reason in the world.

She had commenced to stalk something and wanted to move more silently. Whether her quarry had been some human-being or an animal, Chicka had no means of knowing. So he still followed.

Shortly later the tracks indicated that the tigress had crossed the tributary and her pug-marks were lost to view on the pebbly ground and grass that grew in the jungle into which she had disappeared.

Chicka was just about to turn back when the movement of something black on a tree growing higher up; the sloping bank that shelved down to the dry stream caught his attention. He sank to his haunches and ‘froze'.

That something turned out to be only a crow. But this crow

was behaving in a very peculiar fashion. Every little while it flew down to one of the lower boughs. The tree on which the crow sat was clearly visible to Chicka, perhaps seventy-five yards away. He noticed it was a silk-cotton that had shed its leaves in preparation to receiving the monsoon rains. From this position, the crow craned its neck and body downwards, cawing and fluttering its wings agitatedly. Then the bird appeared to take fright, for it flew up again to one of the higher branches.

After a little while, seemingly gaining confidence, fine crow repeated the maneuver, but after each of these demonstrations it lost courage and beat a hasty retreat to a higher limb of the tree, there to recover from its attack of nerves.

"What was frightening the bird?

At last it left the silk-cotton tree and flew to a neighbouring one that was considerably smaller, and from here started its annoying cawing and persistent fluttering of wings, all over again.

Chicka thought he heard a faint growl.

The crow certainly got a severe fright, for it flew hastily back to the very top of the original silk-cotton.

While he watched, Chicka heard the swish of wing and a vulture clumsily seated itself near the crow on the tree-top. The vulture looked downwards several times and half-spread its wings to dry them in the rays of the early morning sun. But it did not attempt to come any lower.

Another vulture arrived and joined the first. It, too, did not venture to perch any lower on the tree or to settle on the ground.

All these signs conveyed definite information to little Chicka's jungle-trained mind. The tigress had killed something at the foot of the big tree. At that very moment she was either eating it or perhaps had already eaten her fill and fallen asleep beside the carcass to digest her meal. But without a shadow of doubt, she was there.

The crow and the vultures had awoken her. That was why they were too frightened to fly to the ground or come anywhere near the kill. Their strange behavior indicated that, from their elevated position they could see the tigress. The crow was endeavouring, by persistently cawing and fluttering his wings, to

annoy and disturb the tigress and drive her away for a few minutes to enable him to glean some pickings for himself. But the feline was far too replete after her heavy meal and refused to allow such minor happenings as were going on in the branches above, to worry her.

This set Chicka thinking. If he crept silently away without letting his presence become known to the big cat, in all probability she would lie there and not leave the spot for at least another hour or two. That would give him sufficient time in which to summon his master to shoot the tigress.

Silently, and employing all his knowledge of woodcraft, Chicka started moving backwards, a step at a time. He watched the crow and the vultures intently as he did so. He knew that the tigress could not see him from her place on the ground amongst the thickets, while the birds could. If they noticed him, they would register alarm. That alarm would be recognised by the tigress immediately. She would lose no time in either disappearing, or she might decide to investigate what it was that was frightening the birds. And if she followed this latter course she would soon come to know of his presence. Then he would die swiftly and terribly!

So Chicka watched the crow and the vultures. Each time their heads were turned the other way he backed swiftly, half-a-dozen or more paces. Then he stood still when they looked in his direction again.

In this manner, he reached a sheltering bush. Quickly he stepped behind it, and keeping it between himself and the tree on which the three birds were sitting, Chicka faded from the scene.

Once out of sight and hearing of the birds or the tigress, he broke into a jog-trot, and kept this up till he stood at the foot of the steps leading to the verandah of John's bungalow, his chest heaving with his gasping breath, while beads of sweat glistened on his bare torso.

"*Dorai! Dorai!* Come quickly; I've found the tigress", he called loudly.

John was seated at his desk checking accounts when he heard Chicka. He came at once.

The Karumba burst out, "Get your rifle and come soon, *dorai* . The tigress is with her kill and I think you have a chance to shoot

her".

John waited to hear no more. He grabbed the double-barreled .470, thrusting a fist full of cartridges into the pocket of the khaki bush coat he donned.

Summoning the bearer, he said hastily, "Chicka has located the tigress and I'm going to shoot her. Remain here till I return".

Chandra inclined his head, "God grant you good; fortune, *sahib* ".

With Chicka leading, John followed at a rapid pace. When they arrived at the bed of the Karadi Arr, the Karumba pointed out the fresh pug-marks of the tigress that he had followed earlier in the day.

Then he stopped and whispered to John, "Let us plan our attack now, *dorai* . Once we start walking along the bed of the tributary we should not speak at all, even in whispers. There are steep banks on both sides. The sound of our voices will be trapped in the valley; and may be carried to the ears of the devil-tigress".

He went on, "I have an idea and it seems to me the only feasible one under the circumstances.

"We will creep soundlessly along the tributary to the spot where I saw the crow and the vultures. There you must hide behind a tree, on the side opposite where the tigress is lying". "I will continue along the tributary and make a detour, climb the bank, and come out behind and above her.

"When I judge I have reached the right place, I will take cover and tap two stones together softly. I will not make too much noise nor hit the stones together, too often. For if make too loud a sound it will frighten the tigress and drive her away altogether.

"I will make just sufficient noise to awaken and disturb her, without frightening her. That will make her leave her kill and slink away from the source of the sound.

"As I shall be above her on the hill, tapping the stones against each other, she will come down towards you because her natural line of retreat to her cave on the big hillock lies down the tributary and the Karadi Arr. Also, the cover afforded by the trees growing along the banks of both streams will be an added attraction

to the tigress in trying to get away from the disturbance. All this will ensure her coming in your direction".

"And when you shoot; shoot to kill, master", he concluded.

"It's very dangerous, Chicka for you I mean! You're unarmed, and the tigress might hear you above her on the hill. Out of curiosity she might want to investigate the cause of the tapping sounds for herself. Remember, I shall have no means of helping you, because I won't be able to see you or the tigress from the stream-bed".

"Don't fear for me, *dorai* ", was Chicka's smiling assurance, "I can look after myself. Conceal yourself well in order that she does not see you when she descends to the stream".

Again Chicka took the lead and they crept up the dry bed of the tributary. John could clearly see the tigress' pugmarks and the Karumba's own bare-footed trail, as he had walked up and down the nullah a little while earlier.

At last they reached the place from where Chicka had watched the birds on the tree. The crow was not to be seen, but the vultures were there yet. Over half-a-dozen had gathered by now and all of them were perched on the silk-cotton tree. The fact that they had not come down to the ground to devour whatever dead creature the tigress had been feeding upon showed that she was still there.

The Karumba nudged John's arm and pointed with his right hand to the trunk of a large *muthee* tree growing on the opposite bank a few yards ahead.

Greystone knew that the little man meant he should hide himself behind that tree to intercept the tigress, after he had disturbed her. He tiptoed across to the bole of the *muthee* and got behind it while Chicka carried on stealthily up the nullah and was hidden from sight by the bushes and grass as the tributary twisted and turned along its course.

John waited for what seemed an hour to hear the; sounds that the Karumba was to make. It was past midday and the waves of heat danced and shimmered above the sands of the rivulet, although it was cool and shady beneath the *muthee* tree where he leaned his shoulder against its smooth trunk.

At last came the tapping he had been expecting to hear so long. In a direct line, Chicka was less than a furlong distant now, with the tigress much closer to him than to the planter.

John clearly heard the first, two knocks made by stone against stone as the jungle man struck two bits of rock together.

Clack, clack, came the noise; a pause; and clack, clack, again.

There was silence for an appreciable period. Then came the sound once more; clack, clack; pause; and clack, clack.

Noiselessly John pushed forward the safety-catch that brought his .470 to the 'full cock' position. He continued to lean motionless against the tree while his eyes roved searchingly over every bush and clump of grass that grew on the opposite bank, striving to penetrate the natural camouflage created by the play of blazing sunlight upon deep shadows to see if he could detect in that medley of brilliance and darkness, brown and green leaves, grass and ground, the evil form of the tigress striped in her chevrons of black on a russet background, as she crept towards him.

Nothing moved, nor did he hear the slightest rustle.

Again, Chicka banged the stones he held together.

Clack, clack; followed after another minute by clack, clack, once more.

Still there was no movement among the bushes, grass and undergrowth before him. The clacking of the stones against each other now ceased.

Apparently the Karumba had decided that he had made enough noise to awaken the slumbering tigress and to send her sneaking downhill towards the bed of the nullah and John without alarming her unduly.

Ten minutes possibly passed; perhaps fifteen.

Then unexpectedly, as if he had become impatient, Chicka struck the stones together once more clack, clack.

The next moment to John's listening ears came a loud "Arr-augh! Arr-augh!" from high up the bank in front of him, followed by a frightful human scream.

The shriek repeated itself, and some choking words. John

thought he could distinguish "*Dorai* " and then, "Help! Help!”

After that complete silence.

The voice that uttered those screams had been Chicka's. Undoubtedly the man-eater had got him!

In a frenzy of dismay John fired both barrels of his.470 into the air to try to frighten the tigress off the man she had attacked.

He shouted, "I'm coming", and reloading as he ran, started to stumble up the steep bank before him.

Lying on the ground, in a welter of blood and bones, lay the three-quarter-eaten carcass of a sambar stag.

John had no means of guessing where the Karumba had been hiding when the tigress had attacked him, nor where she had taken him after that. So, he started calling frantically as he ran, "Chicka! Where are you?" But there was no reply, only an ominous, foreboding silence.

As John climbed higher he yelled loudly, almost hysterically, “Chicka! Answer me! Where are you?”

In desperation, he threshed about in the undergrowth, panting with exertion and horror of mind as he called again and again to his retainer.

At last he heard what sounded like a groan from somewhere nearby. John halted in his tracks and shouted anxiously, "Chicka! Chicka! Is that you? Answer me! Say something so that I can find you".

The reply came faintly, "I'm here; under a bush".

John located the direction from which the voice had come and pressed forward, searching the undergrowth at each pace as he called, "I hear you, Chicka. I'm coming now. Bear up; have courage".

He found the Karumba beneath a bush where the tigress had dropped him as the sounds of John's two rifle shots had startled her.

Greystone knelt to examine the little man.

Chicka had been bitten through the chest, and there were gaping holes in his left side where the tigress had seized him in her jaws to carry him away. The blood ebbed into the ground in a sluggish, scarlet stream.

With those ghastly wounds, it was borne upon John Greystone that his little shikari had not long to live. Chicka greeted his arrival with a wan smile. In a very faint, halting whisper, his words came, "You were right *dorai* , the '*pischaschi pilli* ' (devil tiger) found me - before I saw her!"

Then he fainted.

Into John's mind pressed the thought—to assume an obsession—he would be responsible if this gallant little man was to die. At all costs, he must take him to his bungalow, and from there to the hospital at Nilambur.

He leaned his rifle against a sapling, knelt to gather Chicka into his arms, and slung the unconscious form over his left shoulder. Then he picked up the rifle in his right hand and started stumbling down the hill. It was a steep decline and he narrowly saved himself from falling more than once.

At last he reached the bed of the tributary and commenced walking as fast as was possible towards the Karadi Arr with the limp body of the little Karumba still slumped across his shoulder. But John had not yet reached it when he felt Chicka tauten, squirm a little and then become limp.

He bent his left hand to touch the Karumba's blood soaked side, but could feel no movement or breathing whatsoever.

Even as John laid the body down on the sandy bed of the tributary he knew that his companion was dead.

Minutes later he picked him up again, slung the body across his shoulder, and made for the Karadi Arr and his bungalow. Tears were rolling down his rugged cheeks.

When he reached the open ground around his house two people saw him. One was June. She had come with an invitation from her father to lunch the following day. The other was Chandra, who had been telling her that his master and Chicka had gone after the tigress.

From that distance, covered with the victim's blood as he was, the planter looked a frightful spectacle. Both June and Chandra came forward at the run to see what was the matter.

Chandra helped to carry the body to the godown that Chicka

had occupied, where they laid it upon his charpoy. His caste does not deter him now, John observed to himself dully.

Greystone briefly recounted what had happened, and as he finished said "I noticed that next to the silk-cotton is a banyan tree with a number of low branches. I'm going back now before the vultures return and I will sit on this banyan all night. Perhaps the tigress may come back to look for Chicka or finish what is left of the sambar. There's just a slim chance although in all probability my rifle-shots have frightened her away entirely".

"But you haven't tied a machan, John", June reminded him anxiously, blushing as she caught herself addressing him by his Christian name.

The planter looked at her for a second. Evidently, he had noticed it too. Then he answered, "A machan won't be necessary. It's quite a thick banyan and I'll be able to squat comfortably in a crotch somewhere. I'll take a cushion with me to make it a little more pleasant".

June's chin tightened resolutely. Almost defiantly she muttered, "We'll take two cushions, John; for I'm coming to keep you company".

Greystone looked up. This girl being with him would impede his movements. It would not be safe. He must not allow it.

Then he gazed into her dark eyes. He saw the raven black hair hanging down her shoulders; he noticed the sling of the .3006 rifle that passed between her breasts to outline their firm plumpness. And he did not protest.

June started speaking. Addressing Chandra, she asked in Hindustani "Will you send word to my father telling him what has happened? Please inform him I shall only be back tomorrow morning".

Chandra promised to convey her message.

"Give me fifteen minutes till I get rid of this blood-soaked clothing", John asked her. "Meanwhile, Chandra will serve you tea and biscuits".

Then he did something that made June choke. He walked up to the mangled body on the charpoy, placed the palm of his hand

tenderly on its forehead, and said in Tamil, his voice growing huskier as he spoke: "Have no doubt little friend and rest in peace; I shall avenge you".

Chapter 29
The Temptation of the Flesh

Twenty minutes later John Greystone and June walked rapidly towards the Karadi Arr, each carrying a cushion and blanket in case the night grew cold. It was shortly after 4 o'clock and his thoughts were entirely of little Chicka who now lay so cold in death on the charpoy in his room.

They met the tributary and changed their course to follow it, rifles loaded and cocked as they watched the undergrowth around for the slightest indications of movement. Soon they started to climb towards the silk cotton tree and the kill. June noticed the blood-splotches that had dripped from Chicka and splashed upon the leaves.

A few vultures, now perched on the ground, had eaten a portion of the sambar which John had had no time to screen with leaves. Seeing them, the huge birds rose to flap heavily away.

He looked at the stag. There was barely enough meat left to justify the tigress' return, but John knew they would have to chance it, as they could lose no opportunity that afforded the smallest glimmer of hope of killing the man-eater.

As the tigress' cave was hardly three-quarters of a mile distant the carnivore might return after all. Then he studied the neighbouring banyan tree. The first crotch where the big branches bifurcated, was about fifteen feet off the ground. Just the right height, he thought, as an idea came to him. It was already evening and they would have to work fast.

"Pile as many dried leaves as possible into one of the blankets and pass it up to me", he instructed June. With these words, John clambered up the tree and pushed the leaves

June handed to him into the depression formed by the crotch. One more bundle filled the hole. John stamped upon the leaves to crush them firmly into the hollow. He laid the two cushions upon the leaves and found they had a clear view of the sambar's carcass by sitting on them. Then he climbed higher into the tree and broke some branches which he kept handy to place around themselves after they had finally settled down.

It was 5:30 p.m. when John said, "Hold my hand, June", and drew her up beside him. Everything was quite comfortable except for the fact that they were tightly squeezed against each other. John stuck the few branches he had broken into the space behind and around afforded by the bifurcating boughs of the banyan, taking care not to impede the view they had of the dead stag.

As machans went, it was a most imperfect arrangement that hardly concealed their presence. But it was all they could do under the conditions and short time available.

The shades of evening fell rapidly after that with the brief twilight common to the tropics. A few jungle fowl called on the Karadi Arr and John and June could hear them from where they were sitting. A family of grey langoor monkeys, going to sleep for the night, bid farewell to the reddening orb of the sun as it sank behind the tall trees to the west with their cries of "Whoomp! Whoomp! Whoomp!" that echoed through the jungle to the hill bordering the Karadi Arr where Chicka had found the tigress' den.

The moon would only rise late-around about 10 o'clock. Should the man-eater return, it would probably be before then and Greystone would have to take the shot as June had no torch on her rifle.

But nothing came and they heard no sound beyond the rustling of a mongoose below as it nibbled at the sambar's entrails.

The hours dragged by. The moon rose, but it was well past midnight before her partial orb ascended high enough to cast a feeble light through the interlacing leaves. It hardly outlined the remains of the deer below.

The sky was clear. This caused rapid radiation and the temperature dropped markedly. June wore only her thin khaki shirt and jodhpurs, while John had not remembered, in his hurry, to bring a coat for himself or for her. They began to feel chill and drew the blankets around themselves.

It was the cold that made John conscious of the warm flesh of the girl so close to him as they sat, shoulder to shoulder, facing the sambar kill. Little gusts of jungle breeze blew with the cooling atmosphere, wafting strands of June's raven hair across his neck and face. To his nostrils was carried the fresh, clean smell of her

body.

Involuntarily, and as much as he tried not to think. Of such things, he began to contrast this odour with the often liquor-laden breath that had been Ruth's, together with the smell of the powder and scent she used. John did his best to control these thoughts. He felt they were disloyal to Ruth's memory. And at a time like the present when they were awaiting the return of the man-eater to avenge Chicka's death, he knew he was betraying the little Karumba too. His whole being revolted against himself.

But John Greystone was a man after all. The thoughts persisted, and grew. Towards the early hours, it became bitterly cold. Their dank blankets, soaked by the dew, accentuated their discomfort. John felt his companion shiver and heard the chattering of her teeth. Protectively he removed his right hand from the ice-cold stock of his rifle and gently slipped it about her slim waist.

June did not protest or draw away from him. Instead, after a minute or two, he felt her snuggle closer.

He wondered. Was it the cold that made her do that or could it be some other feeling?

Ideas of different kinds raced through his brain, and one of them grew in proportion to assume a paramount importance. It became an obsession. The thought was that, before day-break, he would have to discover for himself whether it had been the cold, or some stronger emotion, that made June snuggle against him.

Gently John Greystone drew the girl's body still closer. She could not fail to notice the movement, he knew. If she resented it, she would oppose the pressure he was exerting.

June was a virile girl, with all the feelings and urge of her sex and age behind her. The life she had led with her father in the jungles all these years had forced her to curb these emotions. There had been no man with whom she had had an opportunity of falling in love. So she had contrived to bottle-up the passions that tormented her at times.

The close proximity of this man's body next to hers for the past nine hours had been eating into that restraint. When John placed his arm around her, she had experienced a thrill never felt before. As much as she tried not to, she had pressed herself against

him. She could not still the violent trembling that shook her frame or the sound of her breathing as it came to John in harder, faster momentum.

He read the signs aright and knew that the girl at his side was no longer just a girl. She was a woman in the throes of subjugated desire, now on the verge of rebellion. Slowly and gently, but inexorably, he pressed on to the ultimate surrender of this beautiful creature and of the complete conquest of her body. Bent upon such mastery, he exercised all the wiles of the male.

John kissed her gently on the top of her head, allowing his lips to run down the nape of her neck, and pushed his mouth through her long tresses to the velvety skin, snuggling upon the tender lobe of her ear. He kissed that too and whispered softly, "I love you, darling".

"John, oh John", she murmured, as she trembled yet more with mounting passion.

He bent his head to kiss her cheek, her nose and her lips. When he came to these he found them partly opened, for she was gasping. Eagerly now and hotly, he pressed his in turn over her mouth, ever so gently taking her lower lip between his teeth to bite it just enough to cause the smallest twinge of pain that whipped her rising desires to a climax.

June squirmed around, her hot dark eyes misting with desire. Then he forced his tongue into her mouth and roll-fed it around.

June lost all reserve and began to respond, kiss for kiss; her own slender, wet tongue darting out to meet his.

Placing his rifle and hers in the cleft made by two branches that forked above, John employed both hands to slyly unbutton her shirt and slid them, one after the other, beneath where they worked their way into her brassiere to cup each of her breasts. With the egoistic vanity of the conquering male he was delighted at the feel of the tautened, erect nipples and the squirms of hotness that came with her capitulating, low moans. Bending his head, he nestled one of them between his lips.

Gone were all thoughts of the man-eating tigress. In an outburst of passion, he lifted her to his lap and turned her about to face him.

"I want you, June", he blurted, "now! now!"

"I want you too", he heard her reply.

For the remaining three hours of that early morning they were lost to all sense of the tigress that might; be lurking below and enjoyed to the full the repeated goading of their unbridled desires as they depleted each other to the utmost.

John had found a willing and sensuous outlet for his yearning such as he had never experienced in the artificiality of Ruth, while June was transported to a heaven of delight she had been denied all her life.

They were wrapped in their blankets, asleep, when dawn came, grey and cold, heralded by the clarion crow of jungle-cocks and the calls of pea-fowl and spur-fowl as the sun arose to dispel the dew mat had fallen during the night in wisps of tenuous, gossamer-like mist.

A rain-bird called rapidly from one of the tall trees growing somewhere along the tributary: "Ko-el!" "Ko-el!" "Ko-el!" "Koel!" All creation appeared to expectantly await the coming of the rains.

The tigress had not returned to the kill. John had gained something far more precious than a man-eater's pelt. He had found a new and rich love such as he had never known before.

June came down from the tree awkwardly. She could hardly walk. But, although her demeanour showed she had been conquered, she wore the look of victory that the countenance of an entirely satisfied woman always carries.

Chapter 30
The Man-Eater Scores Again

It was early next Friday morning when Neville Gardner rode out on Tony to visit a nursery of some thirty acres where experiments were being conducted on finding an agent to destroy the insect that was causing a disease known as the "spike-sickness", among the sandalwood trees all over the forests of Southern India.

The track lay through dense jungle for the most part except for a quarter-mile strip midway, where the path circumvented a hillside. Here the vegetation consisted of thick scrub, the thorny jungle-plum growing prominently, with clumps of high tiger-grass and stunted wild-dates in between.

Gardner carried his Paradox, slung muzzle downwards in cavalry fashion in a leather sheath fixed to the saddle at Tony's side.

The horse and his rider negotiated the first belt of heavy forest and came out on to the stretch of scrub jungle.

Everything was calm and peaceful with not a living creature in sight. Tony jogged along serenely, the Range Officer's body swaying rhythmically to his movements. They were almost in the centre of the strip of scrub.

The hill rose upwards to Gardner's right, while on the other side it fell away into a shallow ditch, washed by the rain and choked with lantana and jungle-plum bushes, closely entangled.

Suddenly an elongated orange, black and white form hurtled through the air from behind a tall clump of tiger grass, directly at Tony's chest.

The horse reared backwards, neighing shrilly in stark terror. One of his feet went off the track and slithered down the incline to the left. Tony lost his balance as his hind legs buckled beneath him, catapulting his rider into the ditch covered with the lantana and wild-plum.

The next second the tigress was upon the horse's back, the talons of all four of her paws embedded firmly in his quivering flesh, while she strained her neck forward to reach Tony's throat.

She found it and bit into his jugular viciously. Simultaneously she slid her body off his back to the left, wrenching his throat upwards with her teeth. This dual movement by the tigress caused the horse to crash to the ground. The whole action, performed entirely by the dictates of instinct inherited by thousands of ancestors, was executed as if planned with fiendish exactitude and cleverness. The combined weights of the tigress' body together with the horse's own bulk placed too great a strain on the vertebral bones of Tony's neck at the place where his throat was held rigidly in the tigress' vice-like grip.

There was a sharp report like a pistol shot as his neck snapped and Tony fell dead to the ground, an example of the perfected art of killing performed by a tiger. The only movement after that, and it lasted but a few seconds, was the drumming of his hooves on the ground as his muscles and nerves worked spasmodically for the final time.

Gardner had been badly shaken by his fall. The thorns tore cruelly and lacerated his flesh in the hollow where he landed, but they had also cushioned most of the force with which he struck the earth. He sank two or three feet into their recesses by virtue of his weight and the thorns closed over him. Inflicting many wounds as they did, they also served to hide him from the tigress, and she was too pre-occupied with killing Tony to care where his rider had fallen.

The Range Officer heard the dying screams of his faithful mount, followed by silence for a short while. Then came the tearing of flesh and the crunch of bones between powerful jaws as the feline commenced her meal.

For a long time, Gardner lay motionless, hardly daring to breathe. He knew that if he made the slightest movement the tigress would surely hear it and come to investigate the cause. She would find him and certainly kill him. As it was, why the man-eater had attacked the horse and not him, remained a mystery.

Gardner cursed himself for a fool for allowing himself to be taken by surprise. His Paradox lay out of reach with the dead horse, while he was completely unarmed.

Time passed and the noise of feasting continued. Suddenly, in the far distance, he heard the sound of men’s' voices and the

tintinnabulation of bells around the necks of the cattle accompanying them.

The tigress heard also. She ceased eating abruptly and there was complete silence.

For a moment, Neville Gardner felt like shouting a warning to the oncoming party of cattle-men, but he realized that if he did so they would run away and he would be left to the mercy of the tigress. So, he continued to lie still.

Judging by the number of voices, the approaching group was a large one and they drove many cattle. Perhaps that fact itself would cause the tigress to hesitate before attacking them.

She growled ominously above him, but the men were too far away to hear her. They continued to advance and their voices became distinct, loudly discussing how much dowry one of them should insist upon demanding for the marriage of his eldest son with a neighbour's daughter.

At that moment the tigress' courage failed. With a snarl, she jumped over the hollow into which Gardner had fallen and fled.

The men turned the corner and saw the horse lying beside the track. They noticed his torn flesh, the bones and blood, and knew at once he must have been killed by the dreaded tiger they had heard so much about.

The party turned to flee when the Range Officer made his presence known by calling aloud and trying to extricate himself from the entangling, imprisoning thorns.

Bleeding from a hundred cuts and scratches, he succeeded in crawling out of the ditch to the utter amazement of the herdsmen who were watching the scene. His appearance so soon after the fright they had just received held them rooted to the spot.

They proved to be cattle-owners travelling from one village to another. Because of the man-eater, they had gathered in a large band of over thirty persons for the sake of mutual safety to themselves and their charges, and were passing through the forest during the hot hours of the forenoon in the hopes of avoiding all possible contact with the detested tiger.

Gardner explained what had happened. Then he walked up

to the mangled horse and regarded the remains of the unfortunate animal sadly. "Poor old Tony" he muttered almost aloud, "what a dreadful end!"

Stooping down, he gripped the butt of the Paradox and pulled it out of its holster and began quickly to examine it. To his delight, no damage had befallen the weapon. With the help of the men the Ranger broke some small branches from the surrounding scrub and placed them on top of the carcass to conceal it from the vultures. He decided to tell June what had happened and then return to sit up over Tony's remains.

When the Range Officer reached his quarters, his daughter came out to greet him. Her eyes opened in horror when she saw his ragged clothing land the blood mat covered him.

"My God, daddy! What's happened?" she asked in anxiety, "did you have a fall? Where's Tony?"

To his daughter's rapid questions the Ranger replied softly, "Tony is dead. The tigress sprang on us suddenly from a bush", and narrated the adventure he had been through.

June Gardner cried bitterly. She loved the old horse even more than her father did. He had taken her for so many rides.

When she regained control over herself, she said, "Dad, I've never asked you for anything much before, but now I'm going to, and you mustn’t refuse.

"Let me sit over Tony's body. I want the satisfaction of avenging him. Indeed, I won't rest till I shoot this horrid beast that has killed so many people, and now my poor Tony".

And at mention of the horse's name once more she cried unrestrainedly. Gardner feared greatly for his daughter's safety in giving his consent. But he knew her resolute nature. So, he did not reply, and his silence told June he had agreed.

She borrowed his Paradox with its torch-light and clamp, for there would be no moonlight that might to aid in seeing the tigress should it return. Her sense of hearing alone would have to help her.

At the last moment, Gardner began to regret having not withheld his consent to his daughter's plan. He said, "I don't think I should allow you to do this alone, June. It's most dangerous and I'll

be very worried. Let me go myself; or if you insist, we can both sit together". "No Dad, your eyesight isn't what it was", she answered, "you are too old and the strain too great. As for both sitting, we'll probably make too much noise. Please let me do this thing myself".

That was the reason why, in a fit of anxiety and unknown to his daughter, Gardner sent four coolies who had been engaged on departmental work, to John Greystone to tell him what had happened, instructing the men to keep together to safeguard themselves against a possible encounter with the man-eater.

The coolies departed on their mission and a little later June and her father with three Forest Guards carrying a rope 'charpoy', (wooden bed stringed across with rope), to serve as a machan, left for the place, where Tony had been killed, a little over two miles away. It was nearing 2 o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was shining brightly.

They reached the spot in an hour. June cried again as the Guards removed the branches her father had earlier placed upon the horse's body. Unashamedly she knelt on the grass by Tony's head and tenderly kissed his forehead—the very place where he had always loved her to kiss him during his faithful lifetime.

With eyes brimming with tears she looked about for a suitable tree on which to tie the charpoy. By good luck there happened to be one, a tamarind. It stood rather far away, being a little over fifty yards further down the track that Tony had been negotiating. But it was the only tree in the vicinity, the remaining vegetation being tall shrub and bushes of the thorny jungle-plum.

June selected a spot two-thirds of the distance up this tree at a height of about eighteen feet from the ground, and told the Guards to secure the charpoy there. She and her father sat beneath while the work was carried out and supervised the camouflaging with twigs from the same tamarind tree, so as not to make the tigress suspicious in case she happened to look up.

A small opening was made in them through which June could point the Paradox freely at the direction of the dead horse.

Finally, the task was completed and June felt she was fairly well screened. She climbed into the machan, put a few finishing touches by arranging the leaves that were hiding her, and ensured

the gap in front was wide enough to permit of a clear shot.

The ropes of the charpoy on which she was sitting gave a springy effect to the platform and were comfortable, and what was most important, they would not creak with any movement she might involuntarily make.

At 4:30 p.m. she sent her father and the three Guards away, settling down to an all-night vigil. June was determined to kill the tigress this time at any cost.

Meanwhile, by rapid walking, the four coolies arrived at Greystone's bungalow just before 4 o'clock and conveyed the Ranger's message.

Hardly waiting to hear them through, John grabbed his .470 with a handful of cartridges and a few minutes later was hurrying back with the coolies to the Forest Departmental Chowki. He knew that if he walked very fast he would be able to reach the quarters by 6:30 p.m. as the sun set.

Chapter 31
The Pursuit

Ted Baker looked haggard and ill. He knew for a certainty who had murdered Ruth and he was filled with bitter hatred.

Everything pointed to Chandra as the root cause of the trouble. He was convinced that the bearer had seen Ruth and himself in the throes of their passionate love-making. Because of the servant, they had been forced to hatch the plan of Ruth coming to Nilambur.

Normally, John would never have known anything. But things had not been normal, and John's recent behavior when he had come to report the accident showed that he knew all about the relationship between him and Ruth.

How did John know? He certainly had not seen them. The answer to that was not difficult. Chandra must have told him.

Ted remembered how often the servant had slid into the drawing room soundlessly and surprised Ruth and himself. He had done that while they were actually kissing.

Undoubtedly, he had seen far more.

Ruth had frequently said she detested the bearer because of this habit and had asked John to get rid of him.

But John had not done so.

Why? What strange relationship existed between master and servant to have caused her husband to ignore her request? Ordinarily in India a *sahib* would unhesitatingly dismiss a servant if the *mem-sahib* asked him to do so. But Greystone had shown himself to be an exception.

Was not that strange? Did it not have a significance of its own?

Ted's worried mind began to fret and to fume. He manufactured and imagined reasons and began to wonder whether John had refused to get rid of Chandra because he had especially commissioned the servant to spy upon his wife and report her behaviour with Ted to him.

There was no doubt about it. The servant had hated Ruth and surely hated him also, if for no other reason, that that he was a representative of the British Government.

From all this fretful reasoning one fact emerged, pressing and clear to his thinking. It was his bounden duty to be revenged upon Chandra. The thought became an inescapable urge and by evening he had made up his mind. He would arrest Chandra on suspicion.

It was past 5 o'clock when, carrying his loaded revolver and a pair of handcuffs, Ted left Nilambur for Rob Roy bungalow to carry out his purpose, and it was a half-hour to 7 p.m. when he stopped the car at the portico, got out, and called to the planter.

The bearer came out to greet him with a perfunctory salaam and announced in broken English, "Master, him gone to shoot man-eater near Forest Chowki with Gardner missus. Tiger kill Ranger *Sahib* 's horse. Master come back tomorrow morning".

"I see", replied Ted Baker as he mounted the steps of the verandah and advanced towards the servant, "as it so happens, I've not come to see your master but you. I'm arresting you for the murder of your *mem-sahib* ".

As he spoke, Ted pulled the handcuffs from his pocket and stepped forward to grasp Chandra's arm. But the servant was too quick for him. Bending suddenly, he dodged beneath the policeman's arm, and before Ted could stop him, vaulted over the low balustrade of masonry that ran around the verandah and dropped on to the garden outside. Without stopping, he raced across the compound towards the wall of jungle at the rear.

Ted snatched his revolver from its leather holster and fired once at the retreating figure which he saw in the gathering darkness as a rapidly diminishing white blur. But his shot went wide.

Then he jumped over the balustrade himself and ran as fast as he could in Chandra's wake.

In his school-days Baker had been quite an athlete and had won trophies as a short-distance runner. He now exerted himself to his utmost capacity to catch up with the fugitive.

He saw the servant disappear from view into the dark shadows of the trees, and rather than lose time by futile shooting, Ted ran as fast as he could behind him, still holding the revolver in

his right hand. Soon he too reached the bordering thickets and the forest engulfed him.

Baker stopped for a moment to locate the direction in which his quarry was moving by the sounds of his flight. Yes, he could distinctly hear the crackling of undergrowth ahead as Chandra plunged through the jungle.

Recklessly Ted threw himself in pursuit, regardless of the thorns that tore at his uniform, face and hands, and the trailing creepers that often tripped him up and brought him sprawling to earth.

Now and again he stopped to listen. For some time, Ted was able to hear his quarry crashing through the bushes, but the noise grew fainter and then stopped entirely. Did that mean the bearer had outdistanced him and escaped? Perhaps he had not done so at all but had resorted to subterfuge. He may have hidden himself anywhere in the thickets and be waiting till his pursuer passed. Then the servant had only to retrace his steps to the bungalow and escape while he, Ted, floundered around in circles.

With that came yet another thought and it was alarming. Perhaps Chandra would not seek to escape at all but might try to ambush and murder him in the darkness. For all he knew the bearer might be carrying a knife or some other form of weapon.

It was pitch dark among the trees now and he would fall an easy prey to anyone who might attack him from either side, or come upon him from behind. He would be take completely by surprise and be entirely at the mercy of his assailant.

With that thought, Baker came abruptly to a halt and listened. But the only noise he could hear was his own hard breathing.

He waited till he regained his breath. Silence now greeted him on all sides—intense and complete. Not even a cricket chirped and the trees and bushes enveloped him on every side.

Ted looked about, but his eyes failed to penetrate the gloom in any direction. There was no indication as to which way he should proceed to get out of this labyrinth of vegetation. He had been in such a hurry to leave Nilambur that he had not thought of bringing a torch or even a box of matches along with him.

Not only had he lost Chandra, but he was now lost in the jungle himself. The D.S.P. faced about and commenced to walk back as silently as he could in the direction from which he felt h must have come. And as he walked he held his revolver ready for instant use against the Indian, should the latter attempt to ambush him.

Baker soon realised that in spite of all his effort to the contrary he was making a considerable noise as he moved and stumbled over the roots of trees, stones and the creepers that carpeted the floor of the jungle. As cautiously as possible he continued following the course he had started upon. But he did not reach the bungalow or come anywhere near it. At a guess, he judged he had run hardly a mile up to the time he had stopped and abandoned the chase. But since then he had been walking for well over an hour and must have covered at least two miles or more. His wrist-watch, glowing in the darkness, showed the time as 8:40 p.m. The forest if anything was denser now and the trees appeared loftier and more menacing than ever.

The realisation dawned upon him very definitely then; without doubt he was completely lost. Ted stopped to think. Should he sit down and wait patiently for daylight? Or should he keep on walking till he met some footpath that would get him out of the forest?

Suddenly he remembered the presence of the man-eater!

Great beads of sweat broke out at the thought that the feline might, even at that moment, be stalking him. He strove to penetrate the black void by which he was surrounded, while attuning his ears to catch the slightest rustle as the tigress padded stealthily in his direction.

It was while in this state of acute alertness that Ted first heard it the faint whisper of low voices, talking in hushed tones. For a moment, he fancied it was his imagination, or perhaps the distant soughing of the night breezes in the trees. As he strained his ears yet harder to listen, he heard it again.

Very definitely, men were talking in undertones from somewhere to his right Ted wondered who they could be. It seemed unusual for human-beings to camp in a jungle at night where a man-eating tigress had accounted for so many lives. The thought came to him that they could show him a way out that would save

many hours of weary waiting till tomorrow's dawn. So, he began to walk towards the place from where the voices were coming.

In a short time, between the stems of the trees before him, he glimpsed the flicker of a fire and his nostrils caught the acrid smell of leaves and wood burning. He came to the edge of a small clearing and saw a low outcropping of rock in the middle of this open spot.

On the rock three men sat around a small wood-fire. From time to time two of them fed the fire from a great pile of sticks behind them. The third man was not feeding the fire. He was doing the talking.

What was more surprising was the fact that he was the man Ted Baker was chasing—the servant Chandra. They were speaking in Malayalam, a language that Ted had by no means mastered, but of which he had managed to pick up a few words here and there.

He heard Ruth's name mentioned and something about the jeep. Then there was some talk about Greystone and the Ranger's horse and the tiger. Finally, Ted heard himself referred to as the Police Superintendent, whereupon Chandra laughed a little and he caught the gleam of teeth from one of the other men reflected by the dancing firelight as he joined in the joke. The two men spoke to each other for a while, and Ted heard the thinner of them address his stouter companion as Papachen, who in turn called him Chacko.

Baker pricked up his ears at mention of these names. They were those of the ringleaders of all the trouble that had taken place in the district. The police officer tingled with excitement. What a stroke of luck! Here before him were seated the three men whom he most wanted to apprehend. The man called Chacko began to speak. Ted cursed his inability to understand much of the language.

The thought came to him that they could show him a way out that would save many hours of weary waiting till tomorrow's dawn. So, he began to walk towards the place from where the voices were coming.

He heard Ruth's name used a second time and something about the jeep and the English word, "steering nut". To that, Chandra shook his head vigorously in denial. It was obvious that whatever he was repudiating, the men hardly believed him, for the

question was repeated by both of them, and despite the fact that they were using a language that was foreign to Ted, he caught the inflection of their tone which was decidedly incredulous and bantering.

Again, Chandra denied their accusation or whatever it was they were saying about him. This time, not only did he vehemently shake his head in rejection, but used a foul oath Ted had sometimes heard among his own policemen, to emphasize his words.

The next moment Baker stepped forth from the tree trunk behind which he had been standing listening to the conversation, his service revolver in his hand.

The man named Papachen saw him first and his countenance froze.

Ted said in English, "All three of you are under arrest. If you try to escape, I shall shoot".

Chacko turned his head in surprise to face the speaker. Chandra leapt to his feet.

The muzzle of Ted's .38 covered the three of them unwaveringly. His pale white face, in the dancing firelight, looked very grim. There was an unbroken silence for a full half-minute, and then a crackle and burst of flame as Chacko, nonchalantly, threw a fresh handful of sticks on to the burning pile.

"Don't do that!" Ted rasped.

Chacko laughed, "Why not, policeman?" he asked in English, "If I don't feed the flames the fire will go out. And if it goes out, how will you see to shoot straight?"

And he laughed a little louder at his own joke.

“Come along, get going", Ted commanded, "my car is at the Greystone bungalow. I'm going to take the three of you to Nilambur".

"Assuredly we will accompany you", Chacko continued scoffingly, "If you will show us the way to the planter's house. That is, if you know it".

Then the other man broke in. His English and accent were perfect but his voice carried a peculiarly grating tone.

"Although you are the Police Superintendent", he said, "You don't have the power to arrest us without a warrant signed by a Magistrate. If you have one, may I see it, please?"

But Ted Baker was not going to allow himself to be drawn into legalities. He took a step forward menacingly and pointed his revolver directly at the speaker.

"We'll talk about that later", he asserted, "For the present, I'll give you one minute to commence walking. Chandra knows the way. After that minute I'll shoot and I'll shoot to kill. Two of you are responsible for the murder of five innocent policemen at Ooparpet, and I don't require a warrant to arrest murderers under emergent circumstances".

For a moment Papachen's dark eyes searched the D.S.P.'s face. What he saw there assured him that Baker would not hesitate to carry out his threat. Apparently he gave in, as when he spoke again his voice had lost some of its sinister quality.

"Have it your own way, Superintendent", he agreed with a shrug, "I can assure you that the Congress Party will be informed of this outrage. I'm a sick man, stricken with fever, and you are endangering my health and my life by forcing me to walk".

"You can't be very sick or you would not be in the jungle at night", scoffed Ted sarcastically. "I'll see about your Congress Party later. Just now; get going!"

Papachen got to his feet, followed by Chacko. They were looking at one another meaningly.

"I must insist on being allowed to swallow a dose of medicine first", the former continued, "it won't take a moment nor will I attempt to escape".

With these words, he stooped to pick up a large empty cup that had been lying near the fire. Then he drew a bottle from his coat pocket which, even at that distance, Ted could see bore the label of some dispensary, and poured a large part of its contents into the cup. He replaced the bottle in his pocket and raised the cup to his lips.

"Stop!" Ted Baker's order rang out like the crack of a whip, "that doesn't look like medicine. You are up to some trick. Probably it's poison".

Papachen laughed, "Don't be so melodramatic, Superintendent. I can assure you that I'm not the sort of person to commit suicide. Look, and see for yourself if it's not a quinine mixture".

With the words he held out the cup in his right hand for Baker's inspection.

At that moment, Chacko had a violent fit of coughing that almost doubled him up.

Ted Baker glanced at him to see what the matter was and Papachen seized the opportunity that had been afforded by his companion in distracting Ted's attention. He threw the contents of the cup directly into the police officer's face.

Instinctively Ted closed his eyes and tilted his head backwards sharply. The concentrated sulphuric acid fell on his chin and throat and trickled down to his chest.

The agony made him open his eyes just in time to see Chacko draw a knife from the waistband under his long shirt. Maddened with pain Ted shot him in the chest, and as Chacko sank to the ground, he turned and fired two more rounds into Papachen.

He saw two holes appear in the man's forehead, and had time to note the almost stupid expression that came into his face as Papachen fell dead.

But Baker had forgotten about his third antagonist, Chandra.

The next second the bearer rushed in to close quarters and buried the blade of a knife he had produced from somewhere into Ted's stomach. He started twisting the blade around as he struggled to withdraw it from the Superintendent's intestines when Ted brought the muzzle of his weapon up over the Indian's heart and pressed the trigger; once, twice and thrice.

Chandra died as his body leaned against Ted, and with an effort Baker pushed it away from him. The lifeless servant crumpled to earth. Ted stood swaying drunkenly. His revolver dropped to the ground, and with both hands he clasped the haft of the knife that was still sticking in his abdomen.

He struggled to draw it out. But the blade was imbedded firmly in his guts and would not budge, and his hands turned

crimson and warm with the blood that spouted between his fingers.

The gnawing at his chin and throat from the burning vitriol was excruciating. In a torment of agony, he released the knife-handle and clawed at his neck.

And at that moment Baker knew he was dying. He screamed in anguish as he sank to his knees and men bent double to ease the fearful pain in his stomach.

It was as death came to him that Ted Baker was able, all of a sudden, to think clearly. He saw the kindly face of old Robbie Nicholson and remembered his words, "Keep away from that damned Greystone woman".

Groping for his notebook and pencil, he began to scribble in almost indecipherable handwriting in the fitful glare of the dying fire, while the page grew crimson with his gore.

Then he fell forward in a faint from which he never awoke as his life-blood seeped slowly on to the jungle sward around him in a dark, sticky pool.

Chacko's eyes flickered for a moment and a great spasm contorted his frame as he raised his head and regarded the dying Englishman. From his lips, faintly and hoarsely, came just two words, "*Jai Hind* " (Long live India!). Then he died.

The next day a party of woodcutters were terrified at coming upon the dead bodies of four men, of whom one was a white man—the *Sahib* from the Police. At the side of his body they found the little notebook and they thought they might get a reward when they reported what they had discovered.

Chapter 32
The Coming of the Rains

It was practically dark when John reached the Forest Chowki and met Neville Gardner.

Greystone was worried. "This tigress is a very crafty animal, Mr. Gardner. Chicka was pounced upon before even he saw her. She may attempt to jump or even climb up and drag June out of her machan. Remember, she sprang upon that rock and killed the Malayali. How high did you say she is perched? Do you think the tigress could climb the tree?"

"The machan is about eighteen feet off the ground", replied the Ranger, "rather too high for a tigress to spring.

She might try climbing. But that would give June enough time for a shot".

"Is she using her .3006?" John inquired.

"No. She took my Paradox", returned Gardner, "it's a most efficient weapon and my daughter is a courageous girl".

"That I know very well", answered John, "but all the same I'm anxious".

After another moment, he addressed the elder man again. "Look, I suggest we go to within a mile or so from where June is sitting and wait there. If we hear a shot, we can call out to ask if she needs assistance. At least we will be on hand to bring her down from the machan".

The Range Officer agreed readily and went indoors to return carrying the petromax light with June's .3006 rifle and some cartridges. He took the lead and they barely spoke as they walked rapidly till they reached the place Gardner had in mind. Coming to a halt he whispered, “Here we are. Let's hide the petromax behind this tree and wait silently". The time was a few minutes before 8 o'clock.

In her perch on the tamarind tree, June had sat practically motionless all through the evening listening to the noises of the jungle. From the valley, she faced came the cooing of a speckled

dove, "Koo-Kroooo! Koo-Kroooo! Koo-Kroooo!" As darkness fell she became alert for the slightest rustle or the padded footfalls that would warn her of the man-eater's approach.

Due to the gloom Tony's carcass was invisible. She would have to rely entirely on her sense of hearing. Time passed and the blackness of the forest enshrouded her on all sides. Crickets chirped in concord in the long grass and an owl hooted dismally in the valley. In the distance lightning flickered against the sky, throwing a pale phosphorescent sheen into the obscurity of the jungle night.

A minute later she heard the pitter-patter pitter-patter of quick footsteps on dead leaves, and the rustle of grass. There was a low growl, followed by a disdainful "Cheay! Gro-ooo! Gro-ooo! Gro-ooo!"

June knew a wandering hyaena was passing beneath, attracted by the faint stench that came from the horse's remains.

Suddenly, from the valley to the west of the sloping hillside came the startled call of a langoor monkey watchman, "Ah-har! Harr! Harr!" he cried.

In the jungle, every group of these monkeys appoints one of their senior members at a time to guard them from surprise attack by a skulking panther or tiger, and the watchmen take it by turn throughout the day and night to remain on the alert against a prowling marauder.

The langoor watchman continued calling persistently. Without doubt the tigress was on the move and the monkey.

With the thumb of her right-hand, June slipped the safety-catch forward on the Paradox, every fibre in her body alert while her eyes strained painfully into the murkiness at the spot where she knew Tony lay.

The watchful monkey had ceased his cries when she became aware of the faintest of rustling sounds directly below her, followed by what seemed like a low, heavy sigh and then a peculiarly soft, rasping noise. Had the hyaena returned?

But experienced as she was in the habits of the animals of the wild, June knew the tigress was licking herself as she stood over Tony's carcass.

It was two or three minutes later before she heard the first sharp crack of a bone, followed by the tearing of meat.

The great cat had commenced to eat.

Steeling her nerves to curb growing excitement, June forced herself to wait another five minutes. By then the rending of flesh and the cracking of bones merged into continuous oneness as the tigress became engrossed in her meal.

June judged the time had come for her to fire the fatal shot that would avenge Tony. Slowly, with well-nigh imperceptible movement, she gently raised the gun and fitted the butt firmly into her right shoulder.

Then she took a deep breath, held it, and gradually brought the ball of her left thumb down on the button of the three-cell torch that was clamped to the barrels.

The next instant the bright light showed up the tigress crouched over Tony, her head invisible for the moment, buried in the opening she had bitten into his stomach. That was when June made a mistake. Without waiting for enough of that head and neck to become visible, she aimed quickly at the tigress' left shoulder and squeezed the trigger.

There was a thunderous report and the Paradox kicked like a mule.

The feline answered with a hideous roar that began even while her head was yet inside Tony's belly. Simultaneously she threw herself backwards and rolled over in a heap, concealed now by a clump of grass.

June fired her second barrel when the tigress rolled backwards, but the pointed conical ball from the weapon missed its target.

She reloaded quickly. However, a sixth sense had already warned the man-eater that here was no defenseless coolie. From her place of hiding she jumped the distance of ten feet that intervened to a large plum bush. Behind that she was lost to sight entirely.

June heard her roars as, maddened by the pain from the wound she had received the tigress tore at the bushes behind the plum tree, bit and scratched the ground in her agony and fury, and

then dragged herself away.

Barely fifteen minutes later she was surprised to see a twinkling pin-point of light some distance up the hillside, soon followed by voices faintly calling her name, "June! June! Are you alright?" and recognised them as belonging to her father and John Greystone.

As loudly as she could, she answered, "Yes. But the tigress is wounded. Don't come here; it's dangerous!"

Nevertheless, the light began steadily approaching as the voices alternately called encouraging words,

"We'll be there in a minute", and "Stay where you are till we reach you".

Being aware of the grave danger her father and John were running she screamed at the top of her voice again,

"Stop! Don't come closer! The tigress is wounded! I'm alright".

With all that the light continued to advance. In a short time, the two men arrived at the foot of the tamarind tree without encountering the tigress. A couple of minutes later June was with them, telling them excitedly what had happened.

"Never mind my dear", her father said consolingly, "thank God you're safe. There's nothing we can do right now about the tigress; but we'll return tomorrow morning and try to follow her blood-trail".

With Gardner holding the petromax and leading the way they set out for the Forest Chowki. June's eyes brimmed again with tears as they left Tony's remains for the last time. She knew it would be picked to the bones by jackals and hyaenas before daylight,

"We'll have to get the tigress tomorrow", said the Range Officer, "she may not die of her wound, and should she recover she'll be ten times more dangerous than ever".

When they reached their destination, the Ranger got out a bottle of rum and poured a stiff tot for each of them. Then he offered John one of his strong, black cigars and helped himself to another. They lit their cheroots and spoke about tigers in general

and the man-eater in particular while

June went inside to prepare coffee.

While they were talking, they heard a mighty rushing sound that grew louder each moment, caused by a strong wind that came from the south-west and swished through millions of tree-tops. It reached the bungalow and blew violently against the building, whistling under the half-round tiles. The night was pitch dark as bank upon bank of cloud gathered high in the heavens and piled upon one another.

Intermittently lightning flashed vividly, followed every few seconds by the ominous rolling growl of distant thunder.

"Thank heaven the monsoon is on time this year", remarked John, "it'll break within a few hours. But if it rains tonight the blood-trail will be washed away".

Neville Gardner got up from his chair and walked down the verandah steps into the garden. He shaded his eyes against the light from the storm-lantern hanging from the roof on its hook and looked into the sky, awaiting the next flash of lightning. That came, and the brief phosphorescent glimpse of the heavens it afforded was enough for his purpose. The Ranger returned to the verandah and his chair.

"It won't break tonight", he asserted, "The clouds are still too high. If my experience tells me anything, we should get the monsoon tomorrow evening".

"Good enough", exclaimed John, "as long as we have time to finish off the tigress".

June appeared with a tray on which was a steaming pot of coffee and three cups. They talked the matter over little longer and then the Range Officer brought out his folding canvas camp-cot for John to sleep on in the verandah, with a chair-cushion for a pillow.

Tired as he was, Greystone took off his boots and lay down to fall asleep as soon as his head touched the cushion.

It was 5 a.m. when Gardner awoke him. John heard the tinkle of spoons against cups as June prepared an early breakfast. And the sun had not yet risen when they walked back along the path they had returned the previous night. This time they enjoyed

the cheerful twittering of the birds all around them.

As they had known would be the case, the scavengers of the jungle night had done their work only too well. Tony's remains were no longer a carcass or even a skeleton now. A few scattered bones lay here and there. And when the sun arose and the vultures came even these would no longer remain. They reached the clump of grass and then the wild plum bush behind which the tigress had sprung. Here the trail was clear. The feline had lost a lot of blood and was evidently badly hit. The earth was dug up and the shrubs had been bitten and flattened by her in her agony.

They followed the blood-spoor into a valley, the Ranger insisting on taking the lead. Greystone tried to wrest that position from him but the old man grabbed him by the arm and pushed him roughly backwards.

He whispered, "While I'm searching the ground let June follow behind me and keep a careful lookout ahead. You bring up the rear and watch both sides. The tigress may be dead or she may be very much alive. She may spring on us from any direction without warning. I can't follow the trail and at the same time look about. It's up to both of you to cover me".

They nodded together and did as he had instructed them. In the course of the next two or three hundred yards they found their quarry had twice lain down for rest. There were gouts and splashes of congealed blood that had sprayed the leaves and grass and were visible even on the dried earth.

But yet she had kept on moving.

They had covered over a mile now and it became evident the man-eater was far from being in a dying condition although drops of blood were still visible here and there, the bleeding had begun to lessen. Perhaps a layer of fat or skin had covered the hole made by June's bullet; or maybe the blood on the outer hair had congealed.

At last they reached the valley at the foot of the sloping hillside. A dry stream-bed meandered down the centre. Scattered boulders lay here and there along its soft sand, while both banks were densely clothed with trees: cane-bamboo, muthee, jumlum and tamarind.

The tigress had walked downstream. Clearly, she was in

desperate search of water to shake the burning thirst set up by the fever brought on by the wound, but from the evidence available there did not seem the least likelihood of any pool existing for some distance ahead. She would either have to persevere in her search by continuing along the bed of the stream or give up the effort and break away into the jungle.

Pug-marks in the sand and a drop of blood here and there soon showed she had decided to follow the former course. With Gardner still in the lead, the three of them pressed on.

They walked another two miles. The sun was becoming uncomfortably hot and they knew their quarry would have to lie up somewhere for shelter. The fact that she had continued in trying to find water proved that she was suffering considerable internal pain although the wound had almost stopped bleeding by now.

In a short while the river sand gave place to an area of boulders, large and small, as the bed of the stream fell in gradient and the valley dipped sharply. No pug-marks could be seen here on the bare rocks and Neville Gardner had to search assiduously for an occasional drop or smear of blood.

They had advanced another hundred paces over these rocks when a 'did-you-do-it' bird, the name commonly given to the Indian plover, launched itself screaming into the air.

"Did-did-did-did-you-do-it" the plover screeched shrilly in alarm.

The trio halted simultaneously. Had they arrived at a pool of water at last? These birds invariably haunted such puddles during the hotter hours of the day.

Cautiously they tip-toed forward to the spot from which the plover had suddenly made its appearance.

But there was no water.

What had frightened the bird? Could the killer be in the vicinity? It was most unlikely that the wily plover would have settled on the ground if she lay anywhere close by.

Had she left the stream and gone into the jungle?

These, and other questions raced through the minds of the stalkers as they crept silently forward.

A lump of rock, about four feet high by some eight feet in length, lay at right-angles to their path of advance. Gardner moved to the left of it while June went to the right.

"Ar-ar-arooff!"

That was when the man-eater sprang with a coughing roar at her. It had been lying in wait behind the rock. The girl was taken completely by surprise and stood petrified. Her father could not help. He had already passed to the further side.

But very fortunately John had remained on the alert.

He heard the roar and turned his eyes from the right bank, where he had been looking, towards June.

In mid-air, he saw the tigress about to fall upon her. There was no time in which to even raise the .470.

From his hip he squeezed the trigger.

The heavy bullet struck the great cat full in her chest. She seemed to curl up with the impact.

Instinctively June threw herself to one side in the nick of time to escape the massive body that crashed upon the very spot she had been standing but a second before.

As the tigress threshed in her death-throes, John fired the second barrel of the .470 at point-blank range into her skull.

Then he ran to June and caught her in his arms while her father, hearing the dual reports, rushed around from the other side of the rock.

It was past noon when they returned with men, and a pole and ropes, with which to carry back the carcass of the man-eater.

That evening, at dusk, June's father saw a strange sight and heard a stranger conversation as he came out on the verandah of his quarters. John and June were standing in the garden, wrapped in each other's arms.

"Will you marry me darling, I love you" he was asking, "we'll live on the estate for the rest of our lives, for India is my home, and yours".

And her reply, "Yes John" was hardly audible, for it was smothered in a clap of thunder and the patter of heavy rain.

The South-west monsoon had broken!

But the lovers did not notice it. They remained kissing each other in an inseparable embrace oblivious to the torrential downpour.

Silently Neville Gardner stood on the verandah. There was the light of great joy on his face and a song of thankfulness in his heart. His little Junie had found what he had always prayed that she might get—a good husband!

And the parched jungle had found the longed-for rain.

At that moment, the glare of headlights swung around the corner, and within a few moments the Black Maria drew up before them. The fat Inspector alighted and waddled through the rain to the verandah.

"Mr. Greystone, I have a message for you", he announced as John and June followed him.

From his pocket, he drew a little notebook opened it at a blood-stained page, and handed it to John.

The planter scanned the note, exclaimed "Good God!" and then re-read it aloud.

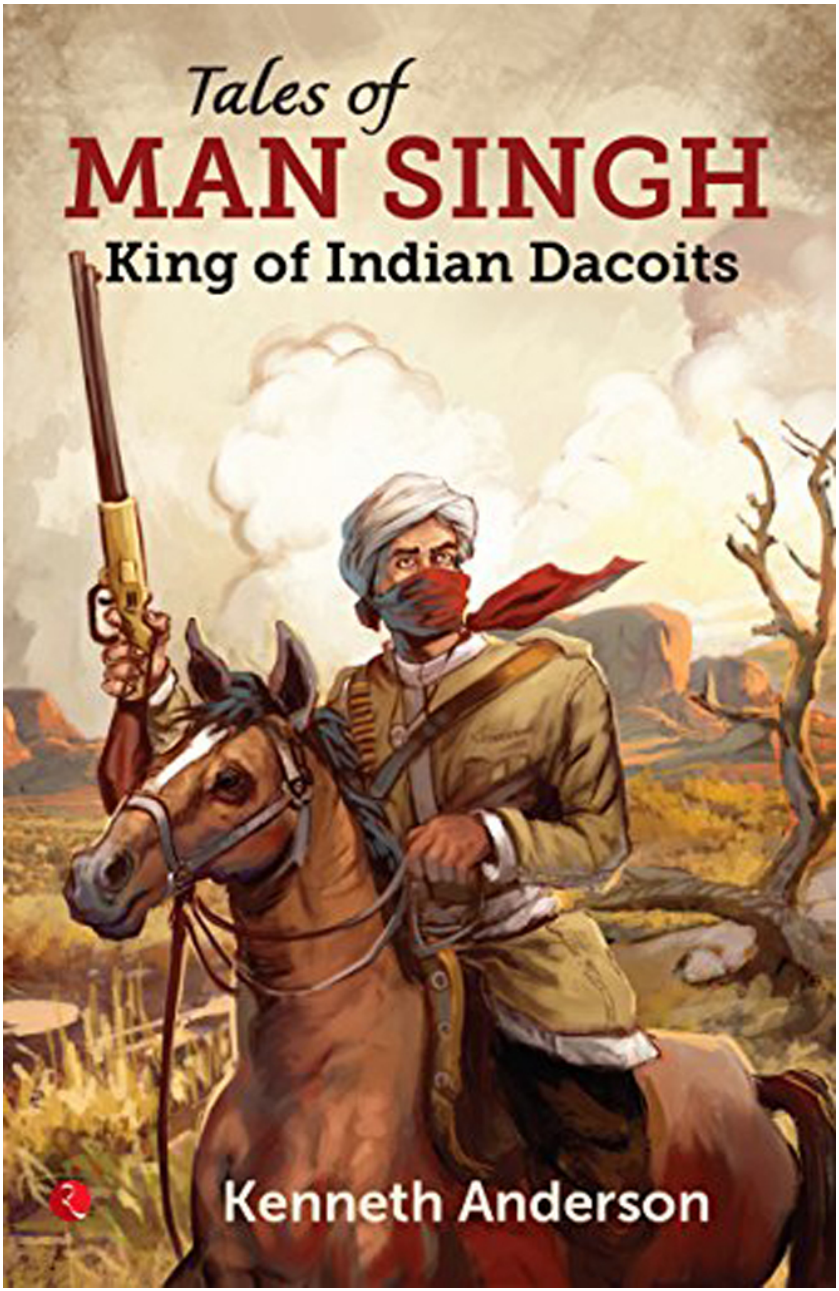
"To John Greystone. I loosened nut on Jeep to kill you and marry Ruth. God—both of you—forgive me. Ted Baker".

"I suspected Chandra", John murmured, as if to himself.

Over June came a great peace of mind. The final doubt had been cleared.

For she had suspected John.

"So Chicka spoke the truth", Greystone murmured scarcely audibly, "he saw both of them through the window and told me one afternoon. But I could hardly believe him".


Tales of
MAN SINGH
King of Indian Dacoits
Kenneth Anderson

Tales of
MAN SINGH

Kenneth Anderson (1910–74) was a hunter, nature enthusiast and an adventure-seeker. His love for the denizens of the jungle led to some of the best literature on wildlife and his books are acclaimed as classics. He wrote about eight books and sixty short stories which recount many of his real-life adventures and hunting exploits in the jungles of South India.

Anderson belonged to a Scottish family settled in India for six generations. He spent most of his life in Bengaluru, where he was employed with an aeronautics company. His invaluable contribution to the shikar literature in India continues to inspire scores of wildlife lovers.

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This book
is
dedicated
to the
Spirit of Adventure,
and to all the red-blooded youths and men
of all countries
who pursue her

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Introduction

The young men and women of free India are indeed fortunate in many ways. They have a beautiful country as their homeland, second to none in the world. A country where they can find every type of geography and scenery that is to be found anywhere else. Some of the highest mountains in the world; wide, rolling plains; marsh land; desert land; magnificent rivers and beautiful sea beaches. They can have any climate; from the freezing cold of snowy Kashmir, to the burning, unrivalled heat of some of the central districts. They have a Venice in Kashmir, lagoons and waterways in Malabar, glorious forests where the King of the Jungle —the tiger—still roams at liberty; picturesque waterfalls; and ancient cities, rich in folklore and history.

The pages of Indian history are generously pageanted by unique personalities. They range from the very bad, like Timur the Lame, to the very good, like Akbar the Great. There are warriors who carved their names forever in the memories of the living, such as Shivaji, the Maratha, and Tipu Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore; there are apostles of peace who shook the world with their doctrines of love, such as Gautam Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi; and there are martyrs who shed their blood for India, in ancient times and modern, including that Joan of Arc of the East, the Rani of Jhansi.

These figures of Indian history, both good and bad, have one attribute in common. As personalities, they are unmatched, unparalleled, unique. No boy or girl in India who has the ability to read need seek for adventure stories abroad, for his and her own land abounds in them. The stage is set, teeming with heroes and

heroines and in deeds that thrill and chill the blood; requiring but more writers to record them, and the youth of the country to read.

Such a unique personality was Man Singh, King of Dacoits. A man possessing diametrically opposing attributes, he was at once a murderer and thief, generous benefactor and upholder of the poor. Cruel, cunning and sly, he was brave with the heart of a lion. A fugitive from justice for years, he exhibited attributes of true equity to those who followed in his band.

In no way are these stories intended to glorify or even commend Man Singh and his ideals. They are merely yarns of adventure which I truly hope will afford a degree of pleasure to those who read them. That pleasure will be my reward.

Sit with me, then, in your imagination, around the flickering light of a campfire and hearken to the tales I have to tell you. The smoke curls upwards to the twinkling stars, floating in the unlimited space above. At times the fire erupts with a shower of sparks and then dies down again.

Throw on a fresh log of wood, friend. For outside the narrow circle of light is utter darkness, punctuated by the distant chirrup of crickets and the nearer croaking of a bullfrog.

It is dangerous to be left in the darkness, friend. For mysterious and unknown things lurk there, unseen in the Stygian gloom.

And Dacoits!

The Author

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Chapter One

Chota Singh of the C.I.D.

His real name was not Chota Singh at all. (Chota, as those of you who have been in India know quite well, is merely an adjective in the Hindi language, signifying ‘small’; or maybe, ‘short’ or ‘diminutive’.) His real name was Katar Singh.

But he had been called ‘chota’ from childhood, because he was a puny-looking youth, far shorter than the average boy of his age. And the epithet stuck to him like glue and followed him into the Police Force which he joined when 19 years old as an ordinary constable.

Katar Singh, or to give him his nickname of ‘Chota’ by which we shall hereafter allude to him, made up for his poor physique and short stature—he was about 5 feet 3 inches—by a powerful personality and outstanding intelligence.

The story is told that when Chota applied to join the Force as a young man, he, with other applicants, was duly interviewed by the District Superintendent of Police. As those were the days of the British Raj, this officer was a European—an Englishman who had put in many years of service with the Police in India.

The recruits were called one by one in turn. At last Katar Singh stood before the D.S.P. The police officer looked at him somewhat disdainfully and then remarked, ‘We want “burra admi”, (well-built men) in the Force, and not “chota admi” (small men) and weaklings like you. Go home, little man, and apply for the post of a clerk somewhere else; not that of a policeman.’

A rebuff like that would have unnerved a normal applicant at

any time .

But Chota was far from being such a normal applicant.

He answered without a moment's hesitation, 'But, sahib, do "burra admi" always possess "burra akul" (great intelligence)? That is something to be considered, is it not?'

The D.S.P. lost his temper. 'Meaning…' he began.

'Exactly what I say, sahib.'

'What makes you think you are so smart?' queried the police officer, turning red.

'That you will have no doubt about, but will come to know for yourself, sahib; and within two months—If you employ me.'

Impertinent little devil, thought the D.S.P. Thinks no end of himself. Conceited to the very core.

And then, aloud, to the little man. 'Suppose I take you at your word and enrol you right away and put you on probation on night duty. Will you still be able to make me agree within those two months?'

'Without the least shadow of doubt, huzoor', Katar Singh had returned immediately.

And throughout the whole conversation he had looked the D.S.P. in the eyes, without once turning his head away.

'Dammit, I will take you at your word. But remember, out you go after the two months are over, unless you do something very unusual to prove your mettle.'

'That is all I ask for, sahib,' Chota had concluded.

Within five weeks of that day, Katar Singh, alone on night duty, caught and brought in a notorious cat burglar. Single-handed.

The police had been searching unsuccessfully for that cat burglar for the past two years.

And that was how Katar Singh, or 'Chota' as he was better known from top to bottom in the Police Force, came to be confirmed after his probation, although his medical sheet recorded figures which were far below the standard required for a 'pass' with reference to his height, chest measurements and weight.

That was only the beginning .

Chota showed unusual abilities for turning in reports that were brief and to the point. He appeared to have the natural gift of being able to discern facts that were of evidential value, and to discard matters that were of little importance. Above all, he had the powers of reasoning and deduction that are not very commonly found in

men of his class and grade.

Within six months he was transferred to the Traffic Branch; and within a year of that date had achieved the double distinction of not having lost a single case he had brought in, as well as of having the largest number of prosecutions to his credit from among the members of his branch.

At that time the Government had issued a circular to all chiefs of the Police Force to send some of their best men for special training in the Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.). Chota, with only one-and-a-half years service to his credit had more recommendations, and more grounds for them, than many of his colleagues with 10 and 15 years.

An important factor that had contributed very largely towards his success was his inherent honesty and interest in his work. On the one hand he never accepted a bribe, however large. On the other, he did not invent cases against people in the hopes of getting money from them to withdraw the charge later, or for reasons of vindictiveness or petty spite.

When Chota filed a charge sheet, he only did it against somebody who had really done something wrong; and he succeeded in his prosecution.

Hence he came to be strongly advocated as a very promising policeman, suitable for assignment to the C.I.D.

He underwent the year's training that was prescribed and took to the work as naturally as a duck takes to water, topping the list of successful candidates in the examination.

His career in the C.I.D. thereafter was meteoric. In a comparatively short time he was promoted to Head Constable; and then was made a Sub-Inspector at the first vacancy that offered itself .

Two years later he was Inspector Katar Singh of the C.I.D.; but still 'Chota' to his superiors and friends, and 'Chota Sahib' to those whom he had superseded and left far behind.

Chota was a Rajput by birth, although he did not seem like one in appearance. He did not look martial nor warlike by any means; being puny and slightly-built; affable and mild.

He was clean-shaven and wore his hair closely cropped to the skull. These features were the despair of his family and his closest friends and relations, who deplored his unsightly looks.

Chota himself knew well enough the reason why he deliberately

did these things. But he did not tell that reason to anyone.

He was an adept at disguise and could dress and act any part he set himself to impersonate. And Chota knew a clean-shaven and closely-cropped man could wear a false beard, moustache and wig; whereas a man who already had long hair or a beard, or whiskers, could not disguise himself—unless he chose to shave them off.

So, he wisely determined not to grow them in the first instance. Then the necessity for removing them could not arise. It was easy enough to take them off at any time; but they took long to grow.

His round, pleasant face and mild, brown eyes enabled him to wear any sort of disguise with little risk of penetration. His features had no distinguishing factors.

Chota spoke five dialects fluently, and could read and write four of them.

When Rajah Man Singh and his band of followers commenced to grow in numbers and their depredations increased by leaps and bounds, the police authorities sought means to circumvent him. It was generally known that the bandits had their headquarters among the Chambal ravines, but exactly where, nobody could tell.

That was what the police wanted to find out very much, and quickly, too.

It was most dangerous work. Many informers and police spies had already paid dearly for their temerity in trying to discover the answers to these questions, with their lives .

Headless corpses, bloated, disfigured and decomposed, had been hauled out of the rolling waters of the Chambal and Kunwari rivers. They had been so long immersed that their flesh was soft and rotting. It came off in chunks as the grapnel hooks tried to draw the bodies ashore. Many could not be identified at all. Now and again, by the presence of some trinket or particular mark, the police knew they were gazing at the cadaver of one of their secret agents.

At other times plain heads, minus their bodies, were left behind by the dacoits, spiked to a bamboo or a cut stem in the dense, thorny scrub. Very frequently the head would carry a piece of paper clenched tightly between the teeth even where the rest of the flesh had rotted away. Scrawled on the paper would be a message reading, ‘Let this be a warning to all police agents and informers as to what will befall them when we catch them’. Underneath the message would follow four words. ‘Rajah Man Singh Rathore’.

It was not a popular assignment, therefore, to be ordered to try

to get information regarding this redoubtable outlaw. Police agents came to regard it as a form of official punishment; possibly their death sentence.

Some would try to evade the issue by reporting sick. Quite a number escaped by resigning when commissioned on this duty. A few panicked—and deserted.

Chota went to his immediate superior one morning—an Assistant Superintendent of Police. 'Sir, please use your influence and recommend me for special duty; the duty of arresting Man Singh,' he asked, blandly.

'Say that again,' asked the A.S.P., scarcely believing his ears.

Chota said it again.

The A.S.P. wondered. Did this man know what he was asking for? Possibly his own death sentence. The A.S.P. told him so in confidence.

Chota merely replied, 'It is appointed to every man to die but once.'

To those words the A.S.P. could find neither an appropriate nor an effective answer .

So he made the recommendation.

And the Inspector General eagerly jumped at it.

Chota was paid three months' salary in advance. He was also given some extra money to defray incidental expenses. Thereafter he was on his own for the next ninety days.

Chota had heard all the current stories about how Man Singh defended the poor, particularly men who had been wronged by the moneylenders, by the zamindars, and by the rich in general.

He immediately set about becoming one such poor man who had been wronged in exactly that way.

He dressed himself in rags and tatters—as a beggar.

Then he walked the 63 miles to the village of Dhowd, situated on the nearer bank of the Chambal River and not far from the 'ravines'.

All day he sat himself in the marketplace and begged for alms. At night he slept in the dust of the roadside. And he ate only what he could buy with the few copper pice he was given by the way of charity.

He found out who was the 'baniya', (moneylender) of the place and appeared at his 'dukaan' (shop or business premises).

'Alms for a poor man,' he whined.

Nobody, looking at the bent and haggard figure dressed in rags, covered with filth, matted hair that had apparently never been washed, a straggling beard and tottering, dragging walk, would have recognised him as an Inspector of Police. The disguise was complete.

The baniya promptly ordered him out.

'I am starving, your honour. Spare me a pice,' he cringed, not making any effort to go away.

'Arre badmash!' (Oh rascal!), cried the moneylender, 'if you don't get out this instant I will teach you a lesson.'

'Charity, huzoor; for a poor, starving man,' he begged.

'Oh, Ram, Dehu,' called the baniya to his servants, 'kick this creature out at once; he is annoying me.'

Ram and Dehu promptly, and literally, kicked him out.

But the beggar was back again the next day. Once more he cried out, 'A copper for this poor man,' while standing in front of the baniya's place of business.

'So you are back again', cried the moneylender, testily. 'Yesterday I told my servants to kick you out. Today I will tell them to soundly beat you.'

'Give me an anna, please huzoor,' was the imperturbable reply.

The baniya became enraged. He clapped his hands and his two henchmen presented themselves before him.

'Useless dogs,' he said to them, 'can you not do a simple thing for me? Rid me of this persistent beggar who pesters me each day. Teach him a lesson and beat him hard. Do anything; but make certain he does not show himself here, ever again.'

Ram and Dehu hastened to obey their patron. They administered many whacks with bamboo sticks on the person of the unfortunate beggar in the open street. So much so that even the passers-by felt sorry for him, and murmured beneath their breaths at the harsh treatment of this poor man by the 'sowcar' (usurer) and his servants.

Chota smarted with pain from the blows he had received. But he was also satisfied that he had given a good public performance in keeping with his disguise as a poor beggar being harassed and beaten by the rich. He wept loudly and lamented that Fate could think of being so unkind to the downtrodden as to permit this ill-treatment of a beggar at the hands of a member of the moneyed class.

That evening he sat in the marketplace and showed the stripes on his bare back—real ones—to all who passed by; and he cried very bitterly as he told them the story. ‘See for yourselves, Sirs, how the wealthy oppress the poor in this land.’

But the result he had been hoping for did not come about at once. Chota cursed his ill-luck and determined to try again.

Two days later he appeared once more, this time as if by accident at the residence of the same baniya whose name was Kunjilal. On this occasion, not only was he beaten but also dragged to the police station. Chota did not reveal his identity there, so he received a second thrashing at the hands of the police .

In the marketplace that evening his lament was couched in slightly different terms. ‘Is there none to help the down-and-out in this cruel land? If there was but a leader, I would gladly join him and teach these wealthy dogs a lesson.’

Towards sunset a stalwart villager threw an anna on to the open kerchief spread by Chota on the road before him.

‘God bless you, huzoor,’ he said fervently. ‘Oh, if only the land was left to the peasants how happy we would be. It is these rich people; these wealthy landlords and baniyas, who oppress us. If only someone would lead us against them, they could be overthrown for ever.’

Instead of passing on his way immediately, the tall man regarded him speculatively. Chota felt that he was being closely scrutinised. The dark eyes of the unknown man appeared to bore through and through him.

The beggar pretended not to notice. He stooped down, picked up the anna, and put it into a small, dirty cloth bag which he produced from the waistband of his dhoty.

The stranger had time to notice that the bag contained a few small copper coins only.

Then the beggar restored the bag to its former place, tucked next to the bare skin of his stomach where it was encircled by the dhoty.

The newcomer said, ‘Suppose there was such a man, oh beggar. What would you do then?’

Chota looked up, the light of fanaticism in his eyes. ‘Just tell me where to find him, huzoor,’ he replied, ‘and I will offer myself to him this instant. I will serve him faithfully, if only it is to teach these rich bastards a lesson. See for yourself where I was beaten by

the baniya's servants. Not content with that, they dragged me to the police, who beat me too.' And pulling up the ends of his ragged shirt, he turned his back so that the stranger could see for himself the scars he carried from the various beatings he had received.

But the tall fellow said nothing. Just coughed.

He turned and began to walk away .

Chota felt disappointed. Would he never succeed in establishing the contact he had been trying so hard to do?

Then the stranger halted a few feet away, hesitated for an appreciable time, and retraced his steps.

He said to Chota, 'There are rumours that a certain dacoit hangs around these parts. It is said that he is not really a thief. He merely robs the rich to feed the poor. Is that the type of leader you would wish to join?'

'Oh yes,' returned Chota eagerly. 'If your honour will but tell me where to find him, I will go to him right away.'

The tall man laughed. 'It is not so simple as all that, brother,' he said. 'If it was so easy to find Man Singh; well, I guess there would have been no Man Singh by now.' And he smiled cryptically. 'However, we shall see.'

He rummaged in his pocket and produced a silver rupee which he passed unostentatiously to Chota. The beggar allowed his countenance to beam with gratitude.

But there was more than gratitude that shone from Chota's eyes. There was the glint of exultation. The sheer joy experienced by the trained sleuth who knows that, at long last, he is hot upon the trail.

Chota did not see the tall man all of next day. But he came again the following evening at sunset and handed the beggar another rupee.

The mendicant began to thank him, humbly and happily; but the tall man cut him short.

'Before a disciple can join a master,' he spoke enigmatically, 'it is necessary for that disciple to prove himself to be in earnest, and above all, trustworthy.'

'I am ready to be tried at any time,' Chota answered unhesitatingly. 'Let the master put me to any test he wants.'

The tall man said, 'I cannot be seen holding a prolonged conversation with a beggar in such a public place as this. People would wonder what it is all about. Meet me at midnight beneath the large banyan tree that grows by the road besides the second

milestone on the way to Bhind. I may have something to tell you then. ’

He moved away. Chota salaamed profusely in the manner of a beggar who had just been handed some alms.

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It was inky black beneath the spreading boughs of the gnarled banyan tree near the second milestone as Chota arrived that night, about fifteen minutes to midnight. He had deliberately come before time, because he wanted to know in what manner the tall man was going to approach him, and from where. After all, he felt no suspicion would be attached to his early arrival, even if it was noticed. A beggar would not be expected to own a watch. Apart from that, what more natural than a poor man coming early to an appointment, particularly with the hope of getting some money through it?

But Chota was disappointed in expecting he would be the first to arrive.

Three figures emerged from the blackness cast by the shadows of the banyan’s branches. They surrounded him. By his height, Chota made out one of them to be his benefactor who had arranged the rendezvous. His companions were strangers.

‘You come before time, beggar?’

The voice came from one of the other men. It was a hard voice and seemed to hold a tinge of suspicion in it.

‘Sirs, I am a stranger to these parts and have never been to this spot before. Besides, I own no watch. When the village ‘ghadi’, (a bell or gong sounded in some public place to record each hour) struck the hour of eleven, I set out to give myself enough time to come here in order not to keep the tall gentleman waiting.’

‘I see,’ replied the man, apparently satisfied with the simple explanation.

‘We are told that you have been beaten by the village baniya and the police,’ he continued. ‘Why did that happen?’

‘I begged for alms before his shop,’ Chota toned his voice down to a complaining whine, ‘and he ordered his servants to thrash me. Very foolishly I went a second time, although I didn’t know it then, to his residence. I was hammered again and dragged to the police station, where the police beat me some more.’

‘Show me the marks of these beatings,’ asked the speaker, flatly.

‘You may certainly see them for yourself, huzoor. But the darkness.—’

Chota’s further words came to a stop as the stranger pressed the button of a small electric torch, sending a ray of light directly into his eyes. He blinked.

Then he turned around and commenced to pull up his torn shirt as he had done so often before.

‘Take it off completely,’ ordered the same voice, brusquely.

Chota complied immediately.

He felt the three men examining his back closely, and at that minute congratulated himself upon undergoing the various trouncings in reality. Had the scars not been genuine, Chota knew that he would have died violently on the spot. Yes indeed, he owed his life to those real weals across his back. Because they testified that he had been beaten very cruelly in all truth.

A little later he felt a moist finger touching the bare skin of his back. The finger began to rub up and down, vigorously. The wound thus rubbed commenced to burn as the scab was broken off. Then he knew what the man was doing. He had spat on his own finger and was rubbing one of the scabs caused by the bamboo that had been used in belabouring him. Should the scab be unreal and put there by some colouring agent, the spittle would remove it and the deception would be revealed.

On the other hand, the friction now caused by the rubbing finger tore off the newly-forming scab over the healing wound and made it bleed. It also began to smart him sharply.

Chota felt more moisture beneath the rubbing finger. It commenced to tickle him unpleasantly. He could feel a faint trickling of something running down his back and realised it was his blood .

What the devil is the fellow going to do next, he wondered. The dacoits were being cautious, no doubt, and he smiled inwardly to himself.

The rubbing finger started working on one of the other scabs till it also began to bleed.

Then on a third scab. And that bled also.

God damn you, Chota thought; are you going to rub off every bloody scab and make my back as sore as hell—you bastard!

But when the third scab bled the man became satisfied.

There was a distinctly more friendly tone in his voice when he spoke to Chota again.

'Excuse me for hurting you afresh, brother. But we cannot afford to run any risk. There are so many police spies about.'

Chota noticed the use of the word 'brother'. Apparently he had passed the test satisfactorily and the brigands were about to accept him into their fold.

'Let us sit here under this tree and talk softly,' the voice continued. 'We won't be seen.'

All this while Chota had been trying hard to pierce the darkness with his eyes to see what manner of men he was conversing with. His companion of the evening, of course, he knew to be the tall man. But he could not see the other two clearly. The man who had been doing all the talking and was no doubt the leader, was the shortest of the three. He appeared to have some kind of moustache, but was otherwise clean-shaven. The third man who had not uttered a word so far, was slightly taller and fairly heavily built. Chota could make out he was bearded. Every one of them wore turbans.

That was about all that he could distinguish in the darkness.

They sat on the ground and the leader began to talk to him in a whisper.

'What is your name and where do you come from? Have you been a mendicant all your life?'

Chota had carefully prepared the answers to questions of this sort long before he had set out on the assignment of trying to catch Man Singh. He had those answers ready on his lips now.

'My name is Bapat Rao,' he said, 'and I come of Maratha stock from the far away town of Sholapur. My father and my father's father before him were farmers. Our family possessed many acres of land then.

'But the monsoons failed successively and a long drought set in. The crops withered and there was no grain. Then the cattle began to die in scores. The little money we had saved up, we spent in buying gram for the animals and grain for ourselves, imported into the town from other districts. In our area, there was not a single green blade of grass to be seen anywhere.

'My father, in his desperation, mortgaged our land to the local baniya, Mohan Lal, intending with the next monsoons, when the crops grew again, to redeem it.

'But there was no next monsoon, Sirs; nor did the crops grow

again. At least, not that next year nor the year after. For three years in succession God scourged Sholapur and the district around it, for hundreds of miles. All the money we had borrowed from Mohan Lal was spent. My father went to him again and the wily moneylender advanced still more money on our farm. And then there was a third mortgage.

'The rains came on the fourth year. But God was still angry with us. After withholding the monsoon for three years, He sent the rain on the fourth year. But He sent it in overabundance.

'The rivers rose and the floods came. Our fields, that had been parched for so long, were now inundated. And our house, which was built mostly of mud and unbaked bricks, collapsed entirely.

'That was the last blow, Sirs, from which my poor father could not recover. The cruel Mohan Lal prosecuted and our lands were auctioned to discharge the mortgage that had been raised on them. After paying Mohan Lal his capital and accrued interest on the three loans, and the cost of the case at court, there was just a few rupees left for food for a few days .

'We were landless, homeless and put on the streets.'

'The blow killed my poor mother within two months. She had always been a frail and sickly woman, of small stature—and that is why I am short and frail, too, as I have taken after her. The exposure of sleeping under trees by the wayside at night, unprotected from the cold and dew gave her pneumonia, to which she succumbed within six days.

'My father became practically mad after that. Our mother had been his sole consolation through all his troubles. With her death he felt he could face the world no longer.

'The very night of the day on which mother died, my father hung himself from a branch of the mahua tree under which we were all sleeping.

'You can imagine our plight next morning when we awoke, Sirs. Dangling before our eyes was the corpse of our father. The rope which he had tied around his neck, and the other end of which he had attached to a branch that spread above us, before he had jumped off, was stretched taut with the weight of our poor father which hung from it. His eyes bulged in a ghastly manner; his tongue lolled out and had become quite black. Slowly his body swayed and revolved on the tightly-stretched rope, blown by the fresh breeze of that early, but dreadful dawn.

‘On the ground lay the yet-uncremated remains of our beloved mother. She had died the previous morning. By that evening she would be stinking in that hot climate. We had no money to conduct the two cremation ceremonies.

‘My young brother and I and my sister who was still younger—a comely girl not yet 14 years old—had been left behind to face the cruel hard world, without an anna for the three of us.

‘I well remember that awful morning, Sirs,’ continued Chota reminiscently, a sob creeping into his voice. ‘For some time we were silent, too shocked and bereft of words even to speak. Then my sister began to cry, and my brother and I joined her.

‘Next my brother, who had always had the most brains amongst the three of us, did a very dreadful thing. In a paroxysm of pent-up and confused rage, he began to curse the corpse of our dead father as it dangled in the air.

‘“You beast,” he cried loudly, with tears streaming down his face and shaking his fists in the air, “you have brought us to this state. You mortgaged our lands and home. You starved our dear mother so that she became too weak to resist the sickness that overtook her. And now, damned coward that you are, you killed yourself because you were too much of a bandicoot (a very large rat the size of a guinea pig) to carry the burden you had thrust upon her. We are your children. You begot us. Now, how are we to live?”

‘His voice rose to a frenzied scream. “Don’t just hang there and stare at us with those dreadful bulging eyes and your tongue lolling out of your mouth, but answer us,” he wailed. “You, who were our father; speak and answer us.”

‘And then, in a fearful outburst of hysterical tears, “Damn you! And I say it again and again. You, who were our father; damn you! damn you! damn you!”

‘His behaviour had momentarily shocked my sister and myself into stemming our tears.

‘I loved father dearly, and knew in all fairness he could not be entirely blamed for all the misfortunes that had befallen us. This outrageous behaviour by my brother, Scinji Rao, infuriated me beyond reason.

‘Although shorter than him in stature, I sprang upon him, seized his throat in both my hands, and commenced to squeeze and squeeze and squeeze. As from a great distance I could hear my sister, Kamala, screaming to me to release him.

‘People rushed to the rescue and tore me away from on top of my brother. I had knocked him down and was sitting astride his chest, strangling him with my bare hands. Had they not dragged me away, I would have killed him that very morning.

‘Then the police came.

‘That evening, after a post-mortem held by them, the bodies of our poor parents were cremated. A huge crowd attended out of curiosity, hushed by the awful tragedy of the drama .

‘The inquiries went on and on for days after that. Nothing seemed to satisfy the police. They appeared bent upon unearthing some crime where there had been none, but only a dreadful tragedy.

‘A few people gave us a little food and money. But that was soon finished and we had to work.

‘I never spoke to my brother again after that tragic morning. He went away a few days later to Poona to try to get work. The last news I heard of him was that he had gone mad and was in an asylum.

‘My sister, Kamala, was a beautiful girl; the charms of youthfulness were rapidly becoming replaced by budding womanhood in her rising figure, upright stance and pretty face.

‘The scoundrelly Mohan Lal, not content with all the harm he had done to our family, somehow contrived through his agents to inveigle her to come and live with him. I heard later that, after keeping her for over a year, he had suddenly turned her out into the streets, and that she had gone to Bombay where she is living the life of a harlot.

‘I went as far north as Delhi myself, seeking work but finding no permanent employment. The ill-luck of our family appears to dog my footsteps. And so I come to be here before you all today—a beggar! And for the second time, I have been the victim of the rich and of a moneylender into the bargain; Kunjilal, the village baniya.’

It had been a lengthy tale, and Chota had related it well. Indeed, it was not for nothing that he had spent such a long time in making it up. It just had to be a story that would call for immediate sympathy.

Chota felt he had succeeded and that the men before him had been moved.

He was right. The leader commenced speaking again, but his voice was quite changed. It no longer held the note of curtness and

suspicion that had been there before. It was kindly. Moreover he now talked in a brotherly tone as used between long and trusted friends.

'Indeed brother,' he said, 'yours is a very sad story. It all but brought tears into my eyes. But be of good cheer now, we are your friends. In time to come you will meet another who will prove to be the greatest benefactor you could ever hope for. I am referring to our peerless leader, Rajah Man Singh Rathore, the noble.

'But for now, let us get down to business. This moneylender in the village, Kunjilal by name. Not only has he hurt you, but the Rajah has heard many tales of his oppression, harsh treatment, and his atrocities against the poor.

Are you aware for instance that he is in partnership with his brother in Bombay? They are running a brothel there with over a dozen girls in it. About half of them are from this very village; the daughters of poor peasants who have fallen into this villain's clutches through being in debt. These poor fathers and mothers have been compelled to surrender their growing girls to him for this nefarious purpose.

'In fact,' he continued, 'this Kunjilal is doing the very same thing that your moneylender, Mohan Lal, did in Sholapur. As their names indicate, they are from the same accursed stock—the Marwaris (a caste of usurers).

'Will you help us then to teach him a lesson?' and the speaker came to a stop.

Although the tale of Mohan Lal had been but a figment of Chota's imagination, Kunjilal was very real. The weals across his back that smarted so terribly reminded him of that fact every little while. And the story about the girls in the brothel at Bombay shocked Chota. If it was really true, this blackguard, Kunjilal, definitely needed to be taught a severe lesson.

He found himself wondering what sort of person Man Singh actually was. If it was a fact that he spent a good part of his time punishing scoundrels like Kunjilal, Chota felt that he would genuinely like to make his acquaintance.

Almost with a start he pulled himself out of the reverie into which he had fallen.

'Most assuredly,' he returned; 'in fact, I was just thinking what I would do to him were he left alone with me for only five minutes.'

Chota caught the faint outline of white teeth before him as the

stranger smiled in the darkness .

'My name is Sundar,' he said, 'the tall man who spoke to you in the village marketplace is Datar Singh. This other man here who has not spoken so far is Hyder Khan.'

The last named individual, who was a Muslim as his name indicated, acknowledged the introduction with a low, 'Salaam-alaykum' (Greetings; God be with you).

Sundar continued, 'This Kunjilal eats his food in his own house, but on certain evenings, particularly a Saturday, after dinner at about nine o'clock, he goes to a cottage that he owns in another part of the town to spend the night with some unfortunate girl who has fallen into his meshes, or with one or two of the village prostitutes with whom he has regular dealings. His wife and family know about these affairs but are powerless to stop him.

'We are arranging that a certain very handsome girl of our acquaintance will act as a decoy. She will be introduced to this rascal. Of course he will lose no time, thereafter, in inviting her to his secret villa. On that night his servants, Dehu and Ram, will open the door of the villa, and the girl will be told to go there in advance and wait for him. It has always been worked thus,' he added.

'It will be your job to help Datar Singh and Hyder Khan to overpower these servants—but soundlessly. On no account should they be killed. You three must knock them out; then bind and gag them. When that has been done, send Hyder Khan to call me. He knows where I will be found.

'In the meantime, Kunjilal will hasten to the villa. Datar Singh and you must secure him also—and again noiselessly. That should not be difficult at all,' he added, 'for Datar Singh is a very powerful man.' Once again Chota caught the flash of his smile in the darkness.

'About one o'clock in the morning I will come along with Hyder Khan and we will spirit Kunjilal away. That part of the responsibility is mine. It should not be very difficult, as the village "chowkidars" (watchmen) are our friends to a man.

'You may accompany us after all this has happened as it will not do for you to remain in the village .

'Oh, by the way. When the three of you overpower the two servants, you must also truss and gag the girl, so that no one the next morning will suspect she was part of the plan. The police must be made to think it is just one of the many clever raids executed by

Rajah Man Singh and that the woman played no part in it.

'Come now; let us revise each detail carefully so that there are no mistakes.'

Chota was surprised to find himself entering enthusiastically into this scheme of abducting the village moneylender. He felt he was killing two birds with one stone. Not only could he look forward to meeting the far-famed king of dacoits soon; but that slimy fellow, the baniya, was going to get what was coming to him. Chota could not help but enjoy thinking of the latter prospect.

The plan worked to perfection. Two evenings later the stalwart Datar Singh and the squat Muslim, Hyder Khan, sat talking in the marketplace till late. Not far away, Chota stood before his kerchief, spread upon the ground. He was begging.

Just after 7.30 p.m., when it was quite dark, the girl who was the pièce de résistance of the whole scheme, and who had the previous day been secretly pointed out to Chota by Datar Singh, passed close by the three of them on her way to the villa.

Chota could not help admitting that she was a comely wench.

Datar Singh and Hyder Khan casually followed some distance behind her. Back of them again, hobbled Chota. Ostensibly, his begging, at least for that night, was over.

By the time they reached the villa, the girl had already been admitted by the two servants, Ram and Dehu, who were there in advance to let her in and prepare the place for their master's night of debauchery.

In the darkness, Chota and his two companions stood outside. Then the three of them approached the entrance door, with Datar Singh in the lead.

Gripping the handle, Datar Singh tried to open it.

As was to be expected, the door was fast closed .

He knocked loudly upon the panels. There was no reply for a time. He knocked again.

The door flew open, to reveal Ram on the threshold.

'What do you dogs want—', he began.

Datar jammed his foot against the open door to prevent it being closed again, and the three of them rushed inside.

Chota found himself taking the precaution of closing the door behind them.

Datar struck Ram over the head with some small object he had produced from his pocket, and Ram fell as if pole-axed.

Dehu, the remaining servant, who had been in the next room, heard the thud of the fall and entered to find out what had caused the sound. Hyder Khan tackled him from the rear and pinioned his arms behind him. Chota clapped his hand over the man's mouth. And Datar Singh struck him with the same object he had used on Ram, and with exactly the same result. Dehu sank to the ground in a heap. Chota saw, for the first time, that the object was a wooden ball fastened upon a bamboo stick, six inches long.

So far, so good. It had all been very easy.

The girl had been a silent spectator to the whole scene.

As both the servants were unconscious, Datar Singh now addressed her.

'Come girl; we will tie you up now, so that when these beauties recover and see you bound and gagged—and disarrayed, too—they will think you were as much a victim of the attack as themselves.'

He produced several rolls of cord from his capacious pocket. Not ungently, they bound her hand and foot; and then gagged her with a 'rumal' (shawl), which he had also brought with him. Finally they tore her sari and jacket in places to make it appear she had been molested by them.

Just as they finished, Ram emitted a low groan.

Within the next ten minutes the two servants lay on the floor, efficiently bound and gagged. And it was Inspector Chota Singh of the C.I.D. who took particular pains to ensure that the gags and cords were so thoroughly well tied that the victims could not possibly escape unaided or make any noise.

With this part of the proceedings successfully accomplished, Datar Singh told Hyder Khan to go and inform their leader, Sundar, that everything had, so far, gone according to plan. It was a few minutes after eight o'clock and the two men estimated that the well fed Kunjilal would hardly arrive before half-past nine, after he had dined sumptuously, to enjoy himself with the girl awaiting him.

They were nearly right. At about a quarter after nine o'clock there came a soft knock at the door, and Kunjilal's voice could be heard calling, 'Open up; it is me.'

The two men had thought it wise to keep the oil light burning in the front room in case the baniya should become suspicious if the place was to be in total darkness. But, as it happened, this was not what he had evidently wanted to be done.

Chota and Datar Singh stood to a side as the latter swung open

the front door. The door itself kept them from being seen immediately as Kunjilal stepped inside the room.

He was annoyed, and he was saying, 'Damned fools that you both are. Did I not distinctly tell you to keep the house in darkness?'

Just then Chota closed the front door softly, while Datar Singh hit the baniya over the head with his improvised weapon. Kunjilal collapsed.

The Inspector could not help thinking to himself, and smiling slightly as he thought, that the wooden ball had indeed played its part most efficiently that evening in silencing three men in quick succession.

They were both sickened by the scent of perfume that arose from the prone man. The baniya had evidently saturated himself with it before coming to the villa.

In a few minutes they had him trussed and gagged as efficiently as the two servants.

Ram and Dehu had, in the meanwhile, recovered consciousness. Helplessly, and with eyes wide open in fear, they stared at their master and at Datar and Chota. In the latter they recognised the beggar they had twice beaten. No doubt he would now avenge the injuries they had caused him and would cut their throats. Perspiration poured down their faces at the thought, and they trembled in their bonds.

But they found themselves still alive as the hours dragged by. Kunjilal took a long time to regain consciousness. When he did so he could not speak because of the gag. But tears rolled down the ash-grey skin of his flabby cheeks.

The girl lay bound and gagged in her corner. Kunjilal and his two servants noted her torn jacket and sari, and all three of them concluded that their captors had had her while they had been unconscious.

Meanwhile Datar Singh and Chota carried on a whispered conversation at the far end of the room. His tall companion offered Chota an endless succession of beedies (small cigarettes wrapped in tobacco leaf), as he smoked them himself.

Datar was speaking. He seemed to be in a talkative mood and the Inspector let him prattle on in order that he might learn as much as possible about him.

'Like you, brother,' Datar was saying, 'I was once upon a time a

happy man. I ran a small-scale business. I owned a flour mill in the town of Bhind. It did not earn large profits, but it kept my family and me alive; I should say, comfortably alive.

'Then one day one of the rich men in the town who was, incidentally the President of the town Panchayat (local municipality), bought another mill. I was his sole competitor.

'Actually, the town was big enough for us both to do the same business and profit by it. He was a "lakh-eer", and had hundreds of thousands of rupees to his name, besides lands and houses. The few rupees, more or less, earned by my mill would have mattered nothing whatever to him.

'On the other hand I was a poor man. My wife and two children and myself were entirely dependent on what our mill brought in for our day-to-day food. To us it was our vital bread and butter.

'But this rich man, this president, whose name was Arjun Singh, could not bear the thought of competition. He determined to eliminate us and our little mill, entirely.

'As a first measure, he used his influence with the village Panchayat members to decree that the building in which the mill was housed belonged to the Village Council and that it was now required for other purposes.

'We were thrown out, and could not operate the mill until such time as some other building became available for our use.

'So I rented a small godown and stored the machinery in it, while I tried to find some other room large enough for setting up the mill. You must understand that at the moment there was no other empty place in the village big enough to accommodate the machinery.

'One night some persons broke into the godown by removing the zinc sheeting that formed the roof. They smashed the motor of the machine and removed the cutter.

'It was quite plain to me that no ordinary man, however evil he might be, would have done such a thing without rhyme or reason. Our machine had obviously been damaged at the instigation of Arjun Singh.

'I was hot-headed in those days and I publicly accused him. The President retaliated by making the Panchayat order me to refrain from ever operating my mill in that town again, even if I was able to repair it, and rent a building to house it. Thus this evil and greedy man succeeded in his purpose of removing me altogether

from ever competing against him.

‘Realising the hopelessness of fighting against Fate as far as running my mill in that town was concerned, I sold the broken machine as junk and set myself up in business in a petty shop, vending cigarettes, sweets and a few odds and ends.

‘But Arjun Singh was not content with just wiping me out as his competitor as far as the flour mill came into consideration. He now set himself the task of eliminating me altogether. I really could not tell you why, as I had done him no harm. Possibly he bore me a grudge for publicly accusing him of being the instigator behind the persons who had damaged my machine .

‘Be that as it may, he started harassing me directly and indirectly in a hundred different ways. It culminated one night with the premises of my petty shop being completely gutted by fire and all my stock destroyed. Inside the shambles, next morning we found a two-gallon petrol tin, twisted and blackened by the flames, but still recognisable as a petrol tin. Somebody must have entered through the roof and set fire to the place after pouring petrol over it. It had burnt to cinders.

‘I was ruined entirely and for life.

‘Then the landlord who owned the room which had been burned along with my stock, instigated by Arjun Singh, took legal proceedings against me for damages, saying that I was responsible for the fire through carelessness.

‘In the face of all these troubles there was nothing we could do. At the dead of night I fled with my family from that accursed town.

‘But disaster dogged our footsteps continuously. Exactly six months after the day of the fire—to the very date—the ferry boat in which my family and I, along with several others, were crossing the river Jamuna, foundered in midstream. The river was in spate. Many were drowned, including my wife and both our sons. I was picked up for dead on one of its banks a mile downstream.

‘From that day, brother, I wandered in this land with hatred in my heart against Arjun Singh. It was he who was the beginning of all our misfortunes.

‘All this while stories had reached me about the wonderful accomplishments of Rajah Man Singh, the gentleman dacoit who helped the poor. One day I determined to seek him out.

‘How I found this great man will be of no interest to you. But I found him. Into his sympathetic ear I poured out my sad tale.

Never, to my dying day, will I forget his reply.

'He said, "Be of good courage, Datar Singh. Maybe God has chosen you to help me to help the poor. Would you like to join my band?"

'I was so happy that I could hardly believe my own ears. That very moment I joined the great leader, Bapat Rao, as I hope you too will join him soon. And never to this day have I regretted it .

'Some months later, Arjun Singh undertook a business journey across the Chambal River. I happened to be with a batch of Man Singh's outlaws when we raided and captured a caravan. I am sure our chief knew about it and deliberately assigned me to that band, because among the members of that caravan was my old enemy, Arjun Singh.

'I took him to the Rajah and said, "Maharaj, remember I once told you about an evil man who had destroyed me and my family? Here, before you stands that very man in the flesh. Let me be avenged and kill him."

'"No, Datar Singh, you must not do that now," he had answered me, "every man should be given a fair trial and a chance to defend himself. It is my custom, always, to do this. Then, if the members of the band who sit in judgement on him pass the death sentence, he may be executed. But not till then."

'So the next day a number of the troupe assembled, to whom I told my story just as I have related it to you. Arjun Singh was asked to defend himself. He did so by flatly denying he had ever seen me before.

'Man Singh kept him a prisoner after the trial and sent some of his agents to the town of Bhind to inquire which of us was telling the truth. Those agents came back with ample proof that what I had said had been true, while Arjun Singh was lying.

'The outlaw band passed sentence against him. He was to die. And I was to kill him in whatever manner I deemed fit.

'Bapat Rao, the old rage and hatred that had burned within me for years against that accursed man, Arjun Singh, who had blasted my home and was indirectly the cause of the deaths of my wife and two sons, surged back into me in an irresistible wave of hatred. I drew the blade of the knife I was carrying, and before them all I cut the throat of Arjun Singh from one ear to the other.

'As his warm life-blood spurted between my fingers, my revenge was achieved.

‘Among Arjun Singh’s effects we found much money and some concealed jewellery. All this booty Man Singh handed to me with the words, “They are rightly yours, Datar Singh, for all the wrong that you have suffered at his hands. Keep the lot, or give some to the poor, just as you please.”

‘I returned everything to him with the reply, “Maharaj, I don’t want one anna of the accursed swine’s belongings. You may give everything to the poor. I ask only to follow you wherever you may go.”

‘That was nearly two years ago, Bapat Rao. Since then I have faithfully served this wonderful leader, nor have I ever regretted my decision to do so. More and more have I seen his chivalry and kindness. More and more do I love him. This very night I would sacrifice my life to save his.’

Datar Singh was silent. He had brought his poignant narrative to a close.

Chota pondered long and deeply about everything that had been said. Truly, he thought, the lot of a policeman is sometimes very hard. He has to make the most difficult decisions as to what is right and what is wrong.

Exactly at one o’clock in the morning they heard a soft knocking at the door. Lowering the oil-light, Datar Singh drew the bolts and opened the door a few inches. Outside stood two muffled figures whom they recognised as Sundar and Hyder Khan.

Datar opened the door still wider; and they both entered.

Sundar now spoke, ‘Brothers, you have done your part of the work exceedingly well indeed. A closed car is standing outside. We will put this lout’—indicating Kunjilal, who was staring at them with renewed fright—‘inside, and take him along with us. Come on, let us get going.’

The four of them lifted the weighty figure of the baniya to their shoulders and carried him outside, Sundar stopping just long enough on the threshold to close the front door behind them. Then they bore him down the few steps that led to the level of the street.

Before them stood a Buick sedan of ancient vintage.

Into the rear seat of the sedan they bundled the trussed Kunjilal. Then they got in themselves.

Chota noticed a silent figure standing at the street corner. The man gave no indication whatever of having seen them. He realised that it must be one of the village chowkidars whom Sundar had told

him were favourably disposed towards the outlaws.

The driver, who had remained seated in the car, pressed the self-starter and the engine came to life with a splutter. They moved off and soon had left the village behind.

It was too dark outside to see much, but the headlamps of the vehicle cut a swath of light before them. Soon Chota noticed that they were traversing scrub jungle. It was also becoming chill, as the night air blew in through the open windows of the sedan.

Some hour-and-a-half later the road emerged from the scrub jungle and turned to the left. A few minutes more and they came upon the river running parallel to the roadway. They must be at least 30 miles down the course of the Chambal River from the point where it touched the village of Dhowd, he reckoned.

Ten more minutes passed. Then the headlights showed men standing on the road before them. The car drew to a halt.

'Some owls are wise,' mumbled the muffled figure of one of the men on the roadside.

'So are a few men,' returned Sundar, without hesitation.

The driver switched off the ignition.

'Is all well, brother?' queried the same voice.

'All is well,' intoned Sundar. 'The guest sits here amongst us.'

The other man chuckled softly.

'All right, then. Fetch him out and dump him into the boat. It is right here, at the waterside.'

They hauled the recumbent Kunjilal out of the car and carried him a few paces to the water's edge. Floating there was a boat with a man seated inside.

The four men who had stood on the roadside now joined them. Between them they lowered the baniya into the bottom of the boat.

As they all clambered in, the driver restarted the engine of the car and moved off.

In the boat two men, one on either side, commenced rowing. It slid silently into the night. They were in total darkness except for the reflection of the stars, mirrored on the oily surface of the water that lapped in gentle thuds against the wooden sides of the craft. For all Chota could feel, they might have been floating on a placid pond rather than crossing a river.

After a while, a deeper darkness loomed ahead, and Chota knew they were approaching the opposite bank of the river. With a faint rustling, the prow of the boat broke through the tall rushes that

grew there, and grounded smoothly on the sand.

Evidently they had been expected, for another group of men suddenly appeared, their figures but dimly visible in the darkness.

Leaving the boat, the party waded ashore, carrying the trussed Kunjilal.

Then they untied his legs but not his arms. Nor did they remove his gag.

'Get up and walk, you fat hound,' said Sundar, prodding the baniya roughly with the toe of his sandal.

But Kunjilal had been bound for so long that his legs were benumbed. He groaned with pain and discomfort as the blood coursed through them, setting up the stinging sensation known as 'pins and needles' in his feet and calves. There was nothing for it but to let him lie there for five minutes or so.

When that time had passed and his captors judged the circulation had been restored, Kunjilal was hauled unceremoniously to his feet. With a man on either side, supporting him beneath the armpits, he was marched ahead, while the rest of the party which now numbered over a dozen men, followed in single file.

Dawn was breaking in the eastern sky. They had walked for almost two hours, up and down over extremely rough country, crossing what appeared in the darkness to be deep gorges whose sides rose to towering heights above them. The baniya tottered with exhaustion, and for the last half hour or so had been practically dragged along by the two men who supported him. Chota himself felt dead beat from loss of sleep and his physical exertions.

Then halfway down the face of the gorge they were traversing, they turned a corner caused by a spur of the hillock they had just descended. Suddenly before them loomed the entrance to a cave.

It was quite dark inside as they entered the tunnel, but the party shuffled along, one behind the other.

Chota knew they were following a secret passage of some kind, leading into the bowels of the earth, for he could feel the gentle but steady decline.

The passage negotiated a double-bend and must have continued for a couple of hundred yards at least, when they found themselves in a large amphitheatre, open to the sky which was tinged with the pink flush of dawn. All around in a circle, stony crags reared above them, the walls rising almost perpendicularly from the floor of this natural coliseum.

They stood, as it were, on the inside and bottom of a huge cylinder, open at the top, whose surrounding sides were of towering rock, rising to the height of perhaps two hundred feet. The area of the arena was considerable, and at a rough estimate in the greying light of dawn, Chota judged it to cover about ten acres of ground, forming an almost regular circle.

A few trees grew here and there. Spread beneath them, Chota caught sight of a number of nomad tents. For the rest, the ground was overgrown with coarse grass interspersed with boulders, large and small, that had probably rolled down from the top at various times.

The Police Inspector became lost in retrospection. No wonder it had proved so difficult to find the hideout of this notorious bandit when there was such a natural, secret camping ground available to him. From outside, the terrain would appear to be just an unbroken range of hills. Even from an aeroplane, the significance of the valley would be lost unless the pilot was flying very low. It would appear as normal country in keeping with the surrounding contour of rolling hills and broken ground that extended along these ravines, for miles upon miles on end.

At the same time, he thought that if he could only learn the way to this place and then escape, he would come back with an armed party who could be hidden among the rocks above and around, while another party could cover the entrance to the secret passage. Then the whole outlaw band would be trapped, like rats inside their own hole, in this natural amphitheatre.

It seemed a wonderful opportunity for him, Inspector Katar Singh of the C.I.D., to bring about the liquidation of the notorious Man Singh and his entire gang of dacoits, at one stroke.

They crossed a tiny stream that twined its way through the glade and approached the group of trees with the tents pitched below them.

Looking up to the ridges above, Chota could now make out in the orange rays of the rising sun that bathed them in a golden glory, the figures of armed men squatting behind boulders.

Sentries no doubt, he mused. Although they were clearly visible to the people on the inside of that hidden coliseum, from without they would be unseen.

The glade they were traversing was still cast in shadow as yet unreached by the rays of the rising sun.

Man Singh had a really marvellous hideout here, Chota conceded in his own mind. He did not even want for water with that little stream they had just crossed.

The grove of trees became alive with men who had issued from the several tents, or had perhaps been sleeping in the open. They turned out to inspect the new arrivals as they reached the fringe of the trees.

With a brief word of command, Sundar bid them to halt and sit down on the grass. Kunjilal tumbled to earth in exhaustion. Chota sat down gratefully. Sundar continued alone towards the centre of the group of tents.

They waited expectantly after that.

Ten minutes or so later, Chota saw three men approaching. He rivetted his attention on the first one of them.

He was an old man, stately and tall. His abnormally lofty forehead was streaked with horizontal white chalk marks, from temple to temple. On his head was a high turban of bright blue muslin. Glittering, steely-grey eyes, as hard as the metal they resembled in hue, were topped by shaggy eyebrows. The whole face was hidden by thick whiskers, a fierce out-jutting moustache, and a heavy beard, all the hair being snowy-white. The whiteness set off to advantage the determined profile of his countenance or such as could be seen of it through the beard, moustache and whiskers.

That was his first sight of Rajah Man Singh Rathore, king of the many outlaw bands that roamed the area.

Behind the Rajah was a burly figure armed with a tommy gun carried in the crook of his right arm, and the curved blade of a dagger strapped around his waist.

That would be the bodyguard who, he had heard, always accompanied the leader night and day.

Bringing up the rear of the approaching group, was Sundar.

Chota rose to his feet respectfully.

Man Singh came close, stopped, and gazed at the bound Kunjilal. Sundar stepped forward and spoke.

‘Maharajah, that is the baniya’ he said, rather unnecessarily.

Man Singh smiled vacuously. ‘I can see that,’ he replied; ‘and is this the other man, the beggar you told me about?’ indicating Chota.

‘It is the Maratha beggar, Bapat Rao, your highness,’ confirmed Sundar, by way of a formal introduction.

Chota salaamed, bowing low before the dacoit leader.

'Welcome to our camp and to our band,' Man Singh greeted him, heartily. 'I hope you will find here the justice that the world has denied you.'

With a musing half-smile on his face, he continued, 'So, we have the accuser and the accused, face to face, eh? That will make for a fair trial, indeed.'

They were all silent for a moment.

Man Singh turned then, and spoke to Sundar. 'Unbind the prisoner and remove his gag,' he commanded, 'the poor devil must be feeling terrible. Let them both rest and give them food. Tonight, after supper, the trial of the baniya will be held. '

Chota salaamed again, and the dacoit leader acknowledged it with a pleasant smile. He walked away after that, but Sundar remained to untie Kunjilal and remove the kerchief which had gagged him all this while.

Just as soon as he could speak, Kunjilal came to Chota and fell on his knees before him, 'Oh, spare me Sir,' he implored, almost grovelling on the ground with terror. 'After all, I did not beat you. It was my servants who did it. They are to blame. Please don't tell the old man anything against me. Only persuade him to let me go free. If you will do this, as soon as we get back, I will give you fifty thousand rupees. I swear it, on my honour.' The words came tumbling from his lips in a torrent.

Chota did not answer him. He just stared at the baniya stonily, and in that implacable look Kunjilal saw no mercy—no hope, whatever.

They ate and rested that afternoon.

Just after sunset, they ate again.

Then the bandits gathered around in a circle, a few lanterns were lit here and there among them, and the trial commenced under the open sky, with the line of serrated hills around, as witnesses.

Man Singh sat on his haunches within the circle. His armed bodyguard with the tommy gun ready for instant use, stood immediately behind him. To his right side and ten paces in front, squatted Chota the accuser. To the left, and an equal ten paces in front, sat the man on trial, the accused, Kunjilal.

Chota could see the sweat break out on the baniya's forehead and heavy cheeks and roll down to the tip of his chin in a

successive stream. Kunjilal was so frightened that he never even thought of wiping his face, but permitted the perspiration to drip from his chin on to his lap, creating a spreading circle of wetness there.

Man Singh was speaking and addressing the accused. 'Your name is Kunjilal and you are a moneylender, is it not?' he queried.

'Oh yes,' gasped the baniya, 'but I take only a very small rate of interest… '

The old dacoit did not wait for him to finish, but put his next question, 'Do you know this man here, the beggar?'

'His face is familiar, your honour.'

'Did he come to you for alms?'

'Yes, I remember now. He came once, I think.'

'Did you cause him to be beaten on more than one occasion by your servants, and also by the police?'

'My servants may have beaten him, Sir; but how can you blame me for that?'

'And why did the police beat him?'

No answer.

'Did your servants not drag him to the police station?'

'If they did, I know nothing about it, Sir.'

'And how come you to be here tonight?'

This question was so unexpected that Kunjilal did not know what to reply. His jaw hung open and he was speechless for a while. After that he blurted rapidly, 'Why, your honour, all these men came inside my house and kidnapped me.'

'Where were your servants at the time?'

'They had already been assaulted and tied up,' he complained.

'And was anyone else there, besides you and the two servants?'

No reply.

'Was there not also a young woman present?'

Still no answer.

'Come,' said Man Singh, 'we have ways of making you speak the truth, but we would much prefer it if you did so voluntarily, when questioned.

'How came the young woman to be there?'

'She was sent to me as a prostitute and I had arranged for her to come to that house and meet me,' stammered the moneylender in admission.

'That is quite in order and we find no fault in it whatever,' cut

in Man Singh. ‘If a woman comes willingly to a man, it is entirely their business, not ours. ’

‘But tell me,’ he continued, ‘were you not in the habit of forcing women, obligated to you or bound by debt, to visit you in the same house where you would have them all night long?’

Kunjilal remained silent.

‘There are other grave charges against you,’ continued the old man, ‘which have reached my ears from time to time.’

‘Is it not a fact that, 14 months ago, when a certain bullock cart driver, Rajendra by name, paid you back the sum of two hundred rupees for which he had mortgaged his cart and two bulls to you, having already paid you an enormous interest, you took the money from his hand, while at the same time you declined to return the mortgage bond, thereby robbing him of the cart and bulls and of the two hundred rupees as well, while continuing the debt?’

‘Is it not a fact that, when this cartman protested and pleaded with you on bended knees for what was his own property, you ordered your two servants to beat him soundly although he had fully repaid you all the money due to you, both as regards principal and interest?

‘Is it not a fact that, in the course of the beating, one of your servants struck that poor man on the skull with a heavy bamboo?

‘Is it not a fact that he fell unconscious at your feet?

‘Is it not a fact that you bribed the police to say that he had been knocked down by a motor car which had caused severe injuries to his skull?

‘Is it not a fact that he never regained consciousness, but died in the village Local Fund Dispensary two days later, from concussion?

‘Are these charges true, or not, baniya Kunjilal?

‘Are you not guilty of the robbery and murder of an innocent, inoffensive, poor cartman for no reason, whatever?

‘Do you not possess money in abundance—some hundreds of thousands of rupees of your own, together with many houses and much land that you should have coveted that poor man’s bullock cart and his oxen?

‘And when he repaid you in full for the loan he had taken, both as regards interest and capital, was it right of you to have refused to give him back his bond as well as his property, and then have him beaten up because he begged for it, thereby causing his death?

‘For the last time, I say to you, answer me,’ thundered the old

man's voice inexorably, 'what have you to say? Why did you do these things, oh most wretched among men?'

But Kunjilal could make no answer. He fell on his face and grovelled on the ground and said, weakly, the one word, —'Mercy'.

'You beg for mercy yourself,' said Man Singh coldly, 'but did you extend it to that poor cartman; or to Bapat Rao the beggar, here, when he asked for alms; or to those unfortunate girl-children whom you raped when they begged for mercy from you, and whom you later sent to a brothel in Bombay when you had done with them?'

Kunjilal began to wail aloud in a high-pitched, hysterical voice, just like a woman.

'For the very last time, I give you the opportunity to answer and defend yourself,' continued the dacoit leader relentlessly. 'It is our custom at these trials of wicked men like yourself, to afford them a fair chance of speaking in their own defence. So, speak up. If you remain silent, it will mean you have no defence to offer.'

But how could Kunjilal put up any defence to those awful charges; especially as all of them were true?

Therefore he continued to say nothing.

'Oh children,' Man Singh addressed his band, 'you have heard the charges. We have given the accused an opportunity of defending himself. He has not done so, which appears to indicate he has no defence to offer. What say you, my sons? Be quite fair now. Is he guilty, or not? In your opinion should he be punished or not? And how?'

There was an unanimous roar of the one word, 'Guilty!' followed by desultory shouts of 'burn him', 'bury him alive', 'cut him to ribbons', and so on.

Kunjilal rolled on the ground, howling ever louder for mercy.

'Let the beggar-man beat him first and then cut his throat,' counselled a voice .

Man Singh turned to Chota and said, 'Do you agree to carry out the verdict of this gathering?'

Chota felt that he was in a predicament now, and in right earnest. If he refused, the outlaws would think him a weakling. They might even grow suspicious of him. Whereas, if he accepted, he would be compelled to murder the baniya in cold blood. As much as he detested Kunjilal, he could not possibly do that.

He thought fast, and inspiration came to him in a flash.

He said, ‘Great Maharaj, you are a just man yourself. For me to beat him, as he had me beaten, would be nothing but right and I will gladly do it. But for me to cut this baniya’s throat, when he has not killed any of my kith and kin would, I fear, respected sir, make me commit an unjust and unwarrantable action myself which I will have had no excuse whatever for performing.’

‘Spoken like an oracle, Bapat Rao; shabash! (well done)’ agreed Man Singh readily, ‘I perceive you are a man after my own heart. Therefore I will not ask you to do what your conscience forbids. I will not ask any man to do that. Pick a stick then, of as near as possible the same kind of wood and thickness as that with which you yourself were beaten; if you can remember the number of stripes you received, so much the better; and lay on. For the moment we will suspend the latter portion of the sentence.’

And he laughed heartily over that. Chota could understand that the old dacoit appreciated his viewpoint and sense of justice.

He remembered, and most vividly too, that he had been beaten with bamboos. So he borrowed one from a dacoit and approached the cringing Kunjilal.

‘Be a man for once and take your punishment like one,’ he advised.

Then he commenced to strike the baniya soundly across his buttocks and his fat thighs with the bamboo. To make things more realistic, he administered a few, although not too hard blows, across his back .

Kunjilal screamed with pain and howled yet louder for mercy. Chota began to feel he rather enjoyed what he was doing.

The encircling crowd of bandits applauded vigorously.

After a dozen well-administered strokes, Chota stopped abruptly. Addressing the dacoit chief, he said, ‘That was about the number, Maharaj Sahib, perhaps one or two less in fact than I received myself; certainly not more. But I find little pleasure in thrashing this cringing wretch.’

He returned the bamboo staff to its owner and walked away.

‘Not only have you the quality of justice within you,’ observed Man Singh, ‘but the quality of mercy as well. I like them both,’ he added.

Kunjilal nursed his wounds and whimpered.

But the encircling gangsters were not satisfied. A voice called out, ‘Maharaj, he has been suitably punished for the lesser crime he

committed. But what about the death of the cartman? This stranger, who has just come, talks much about justice. What has he to say to that?'

All eyes were upon Chota once more. Man Singh was watching him amusedly, no doubt curious to see how he would extricate himself from that challenge.

'Brothers,' returned the disguised policeman, 'I merely said that, as this moneylender had not murdered anyone of my family, I was hardly the proper one to be chosen to kill him. A relation of that cartman, if he is here, would be the right person.'

An impasse had arisen and they were silent awhile.

Just then another figure approached. It was that of a tall man with a slight growth of beard. He possessed the old man's features, and Chota knew he was looking upon one of the brigand leader's sons.

'Tehsildar, my son,' said Man Singh, 'here is a curious situation; what would you advise?'

Then in a few clipped sentences, he acquainted his son with the position. Chota noticed Tehsildar Singh glance in his direction once or twice; and it seemed to him those glances were not very friendly ones, nor were they understanding .

The young man waited till his father had stopped speaking. Then he said very simply, 'Father, to my mind the solution is easy. May I have your permission to end the problem?'

'You have, my son,' returned the leader.

Tehsildar stepped backwards two paces till he reached the bodyguard standing behind his father. Stretching out his hand, he got hold of the tommy gun and almost pulled it away from the man. An instant later, four or five shots broke the stillness in quick succession, and Kunjilal dropped dead.

Tehsildar pushed the tommy gun back into the hands of the guard, saying to him, 'Don't forget to clean it.'

To his father and the other members of the band, he said shortly, 'That is the solution; vermin and parasites like this are not fit to live.'

Chota had stiffened as he witnessed the cold-blooded murder of the baniya. Undoubted parasite that he had been, he had still been a human being.

And he had been murdered before his very eyes.

Nothing of importance happened for the next few days, and Chota fell in with the routine of camp life with the brigands. The day after his arrival he was given intensive training in the use and maintenance of ordinary firearms, such as the gun and rifle, of which he pretended to be quite ignorant. He discovered, then, that the dacoit band had their own miniature rifle range, where four .22 target rifles were in almost daily use in teaching such new members as himself the fine art of shooting men—and shooting them accurately.

On the fourteenth day after the murder of Kunjilal, Chota was given his first assignment to front-line activities with the dacoit band. It was a tough one, and incidentally it proved to be his last.

A raid on the house of a rich zamindar, living in a village about 30 miles away, was to be staged. This raid was to be carried out under the personal supervision and leadership of the dacoit chief, Man Singh himself. Chota learned that it was the old man's policy to share the responsibilities and dangers equally with his lieutenants and ordinary rank and file.

To allow the main body to get away with the booty in the event of pursuit, a smaller band of dacoits was arranged to fight a rearguard action, and to distract the police should they come out in force. It would also be one of the duties of this separate detachment to stage a counter-attack if necessary and then beat a retreat in quite another direction to draw the police off the trail of Man Singh and the actual raiders.

Chota was chosen to be one of the members of this rearguard. In fact, it was Sundar himself who selected him. He wanted to test the courage of this new recruit.

The main body of men who were to conduct the raid under the personal leadership of the Rajah numbered twenty, inclusive of their leader. The rearguard unit with Chota and Sundar, numbered six men and was put in charge of Devi Singh, one of Man Singh's higher lieutenants.

The plan was detailed to them after sundown two evenings before the night fixed for the attack. They ate their suppers at about eight o'clock at night, and at 9 p.m. the combined units went forth through the secret passage into the outer world.

They marched all that night, and by dawn had covered a

distance of 23 miles. They were now only 7 miles from the village that was to be raided the following night.

Throughout the day they lay in hiding in the jungle, eating the baked chappatties they had brought with them; and once more at nine o'clock at night they issued forth to cover the remaining distance.

It was not yet eleven o'clock when they reached the outskirts of the village.

Devi Singh with his six men now deployed in a flanking direction to the east of the village. The main force, under Man Singh, was scheduled to attack at exactly midnight. If all went well, and they didn't hear much firing, Devi Singh and his party would understand there had not been much resistance. In that event, their orders were to wait till the shooting ceased and then make their own way back over the 30 miles to headquarters as best as they could.

But if there was heavy firing when the attack was launched, they would know that resistance was being offered in force, either by the zamindar's own people or by the police. They were then to advance to the outskirts of the village at its eastern limits and open fire with their weapons to make the defenders think the dacoits were operating in that direction also.

As soon as the police, or whoever it was that were defending the zamindar, commenced to attack Devi Singh's unit, they were to fall back towards the south in order to draw off pursuit from the main group, who would retreat northwards as they had come.

Eventually the rearguard was to circumvent the village itself and then withdraw towards the heavy jungle that grew to the north. From there on, Devi Singh and his men would use their own initiative to eventually get back to headquarters.

Devi Singh himself was a fierce-looking Rajput, wearing the usual martial moustache and whiskers. He was a thin man, very wiry, and gifted with abnormal powers of endurance and energy. Above all, he was a daring leader, possessing immense personality and great courage.

He hid himself and his little squad in a mango-grove, within two furlongs of the sleeping village, to await events.

Punctually on the stroke of midnight they heard the sound of rifle fire. It grew rapidly in intensity, and soon they heard the rat-tat-tat of automatic weapons in use, and the return fire of other

automatic weapons.

That could only mean one thing. There were police or military patrols in the village; and they were resisting Man Singh's attack.

Devi Singh whispered, 'Come along, my brothers; here comes our chance,' and led them at the double over the two furlongs to the eastern edge of the village.

There he halted them, and under his instructions, they fired five or six rounds each into the air.

The sound of shooting at the scene of the main attack continued unabated. It became clear that the battle being waged there was so fierce as to permit of no distraction.

So Devi Singh advanced with his six men into the by-lanes of the village itself and worked forward to where the fight appeared to be raging. The noise of battle grew even louder.

'Keep together men,' he cautioned, 'follow me closely.'

At the first sound of gunfire the villagers had barricaded themselves inside their houses. There was nobody about and consequently no danger of counter-attack from the rear or resistance from the villagers themselves. They might even be counted upon to render assistance in emergencies. It was only the zamindar's own hirelings or the police force defending him, that had to be taken into consideration.

When the plan had been originally explained to him, Chota had at first thought of deserting should the opportunity occur while the attack was taking place. But later he had abandoned that idea. Of what use would he be to the police now, even if he did desert? He had not yet discovered the exact locale of the outlaws' hideout, or even its general direction amongst that maze of ravines. He would only be able to tell the police that Man Singh had his headquarters in a hidden grove somewhere between the hills. And that the police knew already.

So after much consideration, Chota had decided to remain with the dacoits and go back with them after the attack.

Such an action on his part would bring about three results. Firstly, the bandits would develop more confidence and trust in him. Secondly, they might bestow upon him a greater responsibility the next time which he might then be in a position to usefully take advantage of to help the police. Thirdly, and what was most important, the longer he stayed with the dacoits the more would he be able to find out, particularly facts regarding the different

members of the band and the way that led to the entrance of the secret passage to the grove. That last was a most important factor.

These thoughts again raced through Chota's mind as he followed Devi Singh and the other five bandits along the village lanes .

They turned a corner and came upon the scene of the skirmish.

Nobody had noticed them thus far, all being intent upon the fight. Thus they were able to take stock of the actual position which soon became clear to them.

Evidently Man Singh and his main body of men had succeeded in gaining access into the zamindar's house before the alarm had been raised.

And, when that had happened, the police had surrounded it.

Now knots of policemen could be identified by their uniforms and seen hiding behind walls and corners of buildings, firing up at the windows of the house, from where the fire was being vigorously returned.

Man Singh and his party were trapped inside the zamindar's house!

Again the temptation grew strong within Chota to desert and join his comrades of the police and lead them into capturing or killing Man Singh.

But would they believe him at this juncture? His assignment to penetrate the dacoit stronghold had been kept a top secret. The police patrol here would not know about it. Would they have time to listen to his story? In all probability they would shoot him on sight, thinking he was a dacoit who had been sent to mislead or entrap them.

In the meantime Devi Singh ordered his party into action. 'Take cover men, and open fire on the police. Kill as many as possible. Then follow me and run back to the mango-grove. Be sure that we stick together. Ready now—Fire!'

Within the next few seconds the little band had carried out his orders. They opened fire with a ragged volley. Devi Singh and Sundar carried tommy guns. Chota could see policemen falling in all directions, as he himself began to shoot—but at nothing.

Taken in the rear, the police onslaught on the building came to a stop. At first the policemen were unable to know from where the counter-attack was coming, and they began to fire at random and in all directions .

This afforded the marksmen and the tommy-gunners from

among the main group with Man Singh inside the zamindar's house, and those who had a bird's-eye view from the top storey of the building, of the counter-attack by their small band of comrades, the opportunity they wanted. They took heavy toll of such policemen as exposed themselves, caught between the enfilading fire.

A few minutes later, Chota saw the rear door of the house suddenly open and the dacoits that had been inside make a run for it.

A couple fell to the ground as some of the bullets from the police struck them. But in a trice the rest had disappeared.

That meant that the main body of dacoits with Man Singh had made good their escape. The rearguard unit had performed its job successfully.

Chota could only hope that Man Singh himself had been among the couple who had fallen.

But now a fresh eventuality developed. No longer supported by the crossfire of their comrades from the zamindar's house, the rearguard party of six dacoits and Devi Singh now had to face the full brunt of engagement by the policemen. The latter had also partially recovered from the surprise of the counter-attack to which they had been subjected and were rapidly becoming organised.

The police fire increased in intensity as more policemen located their position. Their tommy-gunners also came into action.

It was soon clear to Devi Singh that his small band was hopelessly outnumbered and out-gunned, and would be wiped out to a man in a little while if they did not retreat.

Even as he thought this, one of the dacoits threw up his arms and crashed to earth with a bullet through his brain.

'Follow me and run for it—to the mango-grove,' he shouted above the rattle of musketry.

And suiting the action to his words, he ran down the village lane, zigzagging as he went to avoid the hail of bullets that screamed in his wake.

One by one the others followed .

Chota hesitated for a second. Should he desert now? It would be easy. Devi Singh would think he had been killed. But then he remembered he had no information worthwhile to report. And he would surely be shot by the police, anyhow.

So he turned and ran.

Towards the end of the lane he stumbled over the dead body of

another dacoit. He recovered himself and continued running.

A little later he found that he had reached the mango-grove. There were only four of them there—and Devi Singh.

Stray shots followed, indicating the police were in hot pursuit.

'Come on, follow me,' said Devi Singh, 'to the south of the village.' They ran after him again, one behind the other, crashing blindly through the darkness, stumbling against thorny bushes and tripping over rocks and the ant-hills that abounded.

Torches began to flash behind them as their pursuers sought to find out which way they had gone.

That was when Sundar made the mistake which was to cost him his life; and some of them, theirs too.

He stopped running, swung around and fired a burst from his tommy gun at one of the shining torches.

The torch went out abruptly as the policeman holding it died violently.

But Sundar had unwisely given away their position and the direction of their retreat.

A burst of return fire came from the police. Sundar stopped in his tracks, turned around slowly, and crumpled to the ground.

There were now only three of them left—and Devi Singh.

They stumbled blindly after him as they heard the running footsteps of their pursuers and bullets whined thickly through the air. Two tommy guns spat viciously from somewhere behind them and the dacoit who was running alongside Chota screamed hideously and collapsed, rolling over and over as he clawed at his abdomen.

There were now only two of them and Devi Singh.

But he was a good leader, and he kept his head. When they were directly south of the village, he stopped for a few seconds till his two companions caught up with him. Then he whispered quickly, 'Silently now; we will work our way up towards the west of the village. They will think we have gone straight on. Try to make no sound.'

Bent double he started running in a northwesterly direction with his two companions behind him.

As he ran, Chota thought to himself that it was now too late for him to desert. If he did, and even if he was not shot by the police, he would have accomplished nothing. Man Singh had, in all probability, escaped with the main force.

There was nothing for it but to keep with the dacoits and go back to their headquarters with them, there to find out more.

It took them but a few minutes to realise that the chase had petered out since they had changed their course at the southern point of the village. Devi Singh's strategy had succeeded and their pursuers had evidently continued on southwards, assuming they had fled in that direction. No more shots followed, nor did they hear any sounds to indicate they were still being chased.

Eventually they arrived at the western limits of the village. Here Devi Singh halted them for a few minutes to regain their breath. Then he led them north-eastwards. By following that direction he knew they would eventually rejoin the path along which they had originaily come when approaching the village earlier that unfortunate night.

They were walking now, silently, and still in single file.

It was just after three o'clock in the morning when they at last met the pathway. Just over three hours ago they had traversed it in good spirits. It seemed like three days. All of them had been alive and happy then. Many of their number lay behind dead now.

But the path led directly northwards and to safety.

They now quickened their footsteps. Still another six miles or more lay between them and the friendly shelter of the forest.

It was 4.30 a.m. and the jungle loomed darkly and directly ahead, when a sudden shot rang out from somewhere in front of them .

The dacoit walking second-in-line, immediately behind Devi Singh, fell dead.

Now only he, Chota, was left alive—and Devi Singh. More shots rang out and bullets whistled around their heads.

They had been ambushed.

Simultaneously, he and Devi Singh dropped to the ground on their bellies and waited for what might come.

Bullets continued to whine above. It was dark and they could see nothing.

Then a voice came out of the blackness, 'Surrender, or you will all be shot,' it ordered.

That voice had come from a little to the right of them.

Devi Singh held his tommy gun ready for action in his hand, while with his right he groped for the stone upon which he had fallen. It was hurting his belly.

Suddenly an idea came to him. Gripping the stone with his right hand, he threw it as hard as he could to his left. The stone landed on the earth some yards away with a dull thud.

Immediately flashes of flame stabbed through the night as the ambushing police patrol opened fire in the direction from which the sound had come.

Devi Singh pressed the trigger of his tommy gun and kept it pressed as he swept the muzzle of the weapon in a slow arc at the spot from which the flashes were coming. There were screams and cries of pain as his bullets took effect on the hidden members of the police party.

Once more, lead screamed over their heads and around them.

In the midst of that confusion a strange thing happened.

From quite close by and in the direction of the forest in front, a horned owl hooted dismally—once, and then again.

And from Devi Singh, immediately to the left of him, Chota was surprised to hear the answering hoot of another owl, again twice in succession.

Only then did he understand the significance of the signals .

Man Singh and the main body of outlaws had reached the forest and had been hiding there. The police patrol had been following them when Devi Singh and his depleted group had turned up from the direction of the village. The main party had heard the sound of gunfire and counter gunfire, and had guessed that their returning comrades from the rearguard party had run into trouble. No doubt they had also seen the flashes issuing from the muzzles of many guns. But in that darkness they had no means of knowing which party was which.

So they had signalled by means of imitating the call of the horned owl, to establish contact. Devi Singh had understood the message and had replied. Man Singh and the main party would now know the police were in the other group.

The very next second proved that he had surmised correctly. Concentrated gunfire from the jungle was opened upon the police in which Devi Singh joined wholeheartedly with his automatic weapon. Chota himself began to fire his rifle rapidly, but shot into the air above the hidden policemen.

Once more, caught by an enfilading fire and this time hopelessly outnumbered, the policemen in the small patrol began to die, one by one.

Their return fire had almost ceased when Chota suddenly felt a terrible searing pain in his chest. Vaguely, he wondered what was the matter with him. Then he realised the irony of fate. He had been shot—by a policeman!

Oblivion followed after that.

Once during the following day he regained consciousness to find himself lying in the jungle. Man Singh sat beside him and was trying to force some water between his lips. But he relapsed into a coma before that could be done.

At night he awoke again to a peculiar and not unpleasant swaying motion. It took him some time to realise that he was lying in an improvised stretcher which was being carried on the shoulders of four of the outlaws .

The pain in his chest was excruciating. It burned cruelly, as if a red-hot knife was being twisted inside. He had high fever and his throat was parched.

Chota tried to speak. But the only sound that issued from his lips was a faint croak.

A hand clasped his and went up to his forehead; while a kindly voice said, ‘Bear up, son; we shall be home by morning.’

That kindly voice had been Man Singh speaking to him. Before he could try to answer, he fell into a stupor once more.

Chota awoke for the third and last time. The sun was shining brightly outside. He was lying on a rasai (mattress) just within the entrance to a tent.

The dacoits had succeeded in carrying him all the way back to headquarters. For twenty-three long miles they had borne him on their shoulders. It must have been a valiant and difficult undertaking, tired as they were and in momentary danger of pursuit themselves.

With all that they had not abandoned him.

Chota appreciated what they had done and marvelled.

Of what use was all this trouble, though? For Chota knew that he was dying.

The pain in his chest was unbearable. Yet he could think clearly.

‘Call Rajah Man Singh—urgently,’ he said in a feeble voice.

One of the outlaws heard, and bent over him with a beaming smile. ‘So, you are awake at last, brother? Don’t fret; you will soon be well again.’

‘Call him, do you hear? Call the Rajah soon—very soon! For I

am dying; but I have something to tell him first.'

The man disappeared, and in a few minutes, Man Singh stood in his place.

'I am glad to find you awake, brother Bapat Rao—,' he began.

Chota cut him short. 'Listen to me, Maharaj Sahib,' he whispered faintly, 'there is something—that I must tell you. There is hardly time—for I am going to die. '

Meanwhile Tehsildar Singh and Devi Singh had also appeared. They listened curiously.

'Maharaj Sahib,' continued Chota feebly, making a mighty effort to speak coherently, 'I—am not—Bapat Rao, the beggar. My real name is Inspector Katar Singh. I am a detective—a police spy who came—to trap you. Fate has ordained—otherwise. Forgive me—if you can, O grand old man! But—but I was only doing my duty—honestly—my duty—my duty…' Here his voice trailed off into silence, and his eyes closed tiredly.

Man Singh thought that he had died.

But Chota opened his eyes after a moment and continued to speak. But his voice was yet fainter now, so that Man Singh had to bend low over him to hear what was being said.

'I succeeded in finding your hiding place—but, thank God, I told nobody about it'. Here he smiled faintly. Then continued.

'Thank you—for trying to help me—for car—for carrying me all the way back here. I am—much honoured and glad—to have met you. You are—a great man. God—bless you—Rajah Man Singh—Ra—Ra—Rathore.'

A convulsive shudder shook the diminutive Inspector's frame; then he was dead.

Man Singh regarded the little body silently, with its chest soaked in clotting gore. His eyes were strangely bright.

Then he said, very very softly.

'Assuredly I forgive you, Inspector Katar Singh of the Police. And I salute you, for you are a brave man. You did your duty and you did it marvellously well. May God rest your departed soul.'

But Tehsildar Singh, his son; and Devi Singh, his lieutenant; had overheard him. They wondered how the fierce old man could yet have such tender feelings.

And they cremated the little Inspector with all religious ceremony.

While of the plucky little rearguard unit that had fought so

gallantly, none were left alive now—
Except Devi Singh!

Chapter Two

Jhani and Lotibai

‘Don’t pull my hair, you rude boy,’ said a little girl one day. Her name was Lotibai, and she was the only daughter of Kumar, a rich merchant in the town of Bhind. She was hardly 10 years old when she uttered those words, and the place was the quadrangle in front of the local primary school building, which afforded the highest education to the children of Bhind that the large majority of parents could themselves afford to pay for in the way of school fees.

‘Why not?’ asked the youth, ‘I like pulling girls’ hair so as to make them cry,’ and he pulled again.

He was a bright looking boy of about 12 years, with merry, sparkling black eyes. He seemed inordinately thin of body, but that was because he was growing rapidly, and all boys who grow suddenly appear thin. His wavy black hair was tousled and hung over his right temple. There was a glistening display of white teeth and a mischievious dimple on each cheek.

And his name was Jhani.

‘Don’t think, because you are a boy and I am a girl, that you can annoy me,’ retorted Lotibai, ‘for I will smack your face for you just now.’

‘Go on, really,’ laughed Jhani, as his right arm darted out once more, suddenly, to give her hair another tweak, ‘maybe I like being smacked by girls.’

But Lotibai had begun to cry .

The smile died suddenly from Jhani’s face and he looked wonderingly at the girl beside him.

‘Now that is what I don’t like about women,’ he spoke the words with all the weight of sagely wisdom behind him. ‘You try to joke with one and she begins to cry. Thank heaven, I was born a boy.’

‘Get away from here, you nasty beast,’ answered Lotibai vehemently, stamping her tiny bare feet on the ground with rage. ‘I shall tell the teacher all about you as soon as class starts.’

‘You sneak’, blurted Jhani, contemptuously.

Just then the school bell rang, breaking in with a discordant clang upon the jabbering falsetto of the other children’s voices that came from all around them.

There was a rush to enter the classroom.

For the teacher, old Mulki Ram, a Brahmin, was a strict man, and moreover very cruel. He would beat children who came late upon the palms of their hands with a thin cane. Rumour had it that that cane had been pickled in vinegar.

It certainly hurt terribly.

The children sat down in their accustomed places at the long desks that traversed the room. Out of the comer of his eye Jhani noticed that Lotibai had stopped crying, although she snivelled every now and again.

He also noticed that the tip of her nose, which tilted upwards a little, was moist and deliciously red, where she dabbed at it and her eyes with a small coloured handerchief.

Jhani felt that he would like to tweak that nose too.

He hoped she would not sneak on him to the Brahmin, Mulki Ram. If she did, he would surely be given a caning, and a severe one too.

All the other boys and girls would laugh at him.

The door opened and Mulki Ram entered the room, walking briskly.

The children stood up in unison and intoned in a sing-song chorus, ‘Goodmorning, Sir. ’

Mulki Ram had, meanwhile, stepped upon the foot-high platform at which stood his large desk and chair. Facing the assembled children, he replied crisply, ‘Morning; boys and girls.’

He was above middle age and had flabby cheeks that sank down to his jaws and pouches beneath his eyes. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles with exceptionally thick lenses. From the angle of vision of the children before him, these greatly magnified the size of his eyes, which assumed ogre-like dimensions as they glared balefully

around, accentuated by his rather predatory nose and thin-lipped mouth. He looked very much like an owl, and ‘the owl’ was the nickname the children called him behind his back.

Mulki Ram was clean-shaven, including the whole of his head, except far a tuft of long, greying hair which hung from a point high up at the back. This tuft and the three parallel vertical caste marks in vermillion powder that had been drawn down the centre of his forehead between his eyes and up to the bridge of his nose, proclaimed to all and sundry that here was a Brahmin indeed, of pure untouchable lineage.

‘I will take roll call,’ he announced, ‘and then we will begin our history period. I hope you have all brought your textbooks?’

Again those ogre-like eyes looked around, and Jhani fancied they wore an expression of eager expectation. Woe betide the boy or girl who had forgotten.

Once again Jhani looked sideways across two rows of desks at Lotibai. Now was the time. If she was going to tell on him, she would have to do it now.

Lotibai appeared to become conscious of his gaze. She looked up slowly, then turned her head slightly and glanced backwards in his direction. Their eyes met.

There appeared the faintest trace of a smile at the corners of her mouth, and Lotibai did not sneak upon Jhani.

Thereafter, their eyes were rivetted upon their history books.

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Seven years rolled by, but they seemed like seven days.

Lotibai was seventeen now, and she was the apple of her father’s eye.

Indeed, she was a beautiful girl.

Of medium height and with raven-black hair which she invariably wore in two long tresses falling down her back, her face was symmetrically oval, her skin as smooth as velvet and of a creamy, chocolate tint. Her eyes were large and lustrous, and appeared to look out upon the world with the innocence and much of the surprised wonder of a startled doe. They were a very dark brown, had beautifully long, curving eyelashes, and naturally arched eyebrows. Her tiny nose, slightly up tilted as a little girl, had become provocatively pugged. Her warm, luscious pale pink lips set

off the pointed chin, dainty yet determined, below it. A pretty red 'bottoo' (dot), glistened on her forehead between her eyes—the religious adornment of Hindu ladies.

Her figure had assumed the full proportions of budding womanhood. The sky-blue silk sari she was wearing bulged gracefully to reveal a black chiffon jacket that clasped the twin mounds of her breasts in a tight embrace.

Lotibai was in love; very much in love.

The object of this affection was the same Jhani; yes, the very same boy who had pulled her hair before school had commenced that far-off morning.

Somehow, they seemed to have just naturally grown into lovers.

They had been playmates throughout their schooldays and had passed out together.

Thereafter, Lotibai did not see much of Jhani in the mornings for he was kept busy, working in the fields with his father, old Balaji.

Jhani was Balaji's only son, just as Lotibai was Kumar's only daughter. But there the resemblance ended. For Balaji was a poor man, a farmer, who toiled with his son to plough the fields and scatter the seeds on the 12 acres of dry land they owned and from which they were just able to eke out a poor living provided the monsoons did not fail, or did not descend upon the land out of season, or in superabundance. When any of these calamities happened, old Balaji and his son, Jhani, had to live on borrowed money and hope for a good crop the next year.

Kumar, however, had prospered. Everything he touched had turned to gold. Not only did his business as a merchant flourish and increase, but he had taken up a new line—that of a contractor to the Government—who supplied all the military garrisons and the local police detachments in the area with their everyday wants, from food to safety pins. This had brought him in enormous profits, and he was now the owner of many hundreds of thousands of rupees.

Every evening—or nearly every evening—Lotibai and Jhani would meet at the marketplace, or sit on one of the small benches in the public park, talking.

(The boys and girls of India, unlike those of western countries, are not encouraged into developing pre-marital friendships between the opposite sexes. Normally and invariably, marriages are pre-

arranged by the respective parents and only during the ceremony do the boy and girl see each other for the first time.

So, Lotibai and Jhani were doing something quite unusual in meeting each other, even if it was but to chat for a few minutes in the open marketplace, or on a bench at the park, in broad daylight.

Any such thing as going to the movies together, or for a picnic or even a stroll outside the village precincts was not to be thought of. In fact, they themselves never dreamt of it.)

Somehow, their friendship with each other became to be looked upon by their respective fathers as an accepted, harmless thing. For had they not known each other for more than seven years? Were they not in school together; even in the same class?

Indeed, the townsfolk of Bhind thought the same thing and did not gossip about it; at least not overmuch. Such few of the old hags as did whisper with heads together and sidelong glances, as the young couple passed by, were known to be frustrated old scandal mongers anyhow; and nobody paid much attention to them. Frustrated people do not attract sympathy all the world around .

Even Jhani and Lotibai themselves did not recognise they had fallen in love with each other. If they had, they would probably have been very frightened about it. They were just good pals—buddies since their schooldays—who still got along well together and enjoyed each other's company. It was all very innocent. Neither of them had ever thought about themselves or each other in terms of sex.

That is, until the day the storm came.

'Jhani, it is going to pour with rain in a minute,' said Lotibai, seated next to him on their usual bench in the park one evening. 'Come, let us go. If we walk quickly, there may just be time for me to reach home.'

'But it is only five o'clock and we've just met,' answered Jhani, glancing up at the darkening sky, resentfully. 'Hang the odds; let it rain. We can always take shelter in the old 'moosafarkhana' (travellers' bungalow) across the road.

'And suppose it doesn't stop?' Lotibai put in, apprehensively.

'How silly. It must stop sometime. Probably by six o'clock or so. It will still be daylight.'

Lotibai was not so sure of the wisdom of remaining, but her liking for the wavy-haired young man seated next to her overcame her sense of caution.

For Jhani, now 19 years old, was no longer the lanky youngster he had been as a schoolboy. Tall, well-proportioned and muscular, the last two the result of his daily toil in his father's fields, he had grown into a strikingly handsome youth. The unruly hair was now naturally wavy, although one end of it yet persisted in falling over his right temple in the same way it had done so many years ago. The mischevious smile was yet there, to reveal the same gleaming white teeth. His dark eyes still sparkled with the joy of living.

But he no longer pulled her hair or tweaked her nose.

'Well, if I get drenched, you will be responsible for it, and I shan't meet you tomorrow evening,' Lotibai pouted, a softness in her tone quite belying the threat her words had been intended to convey.

Jhani knew they would meet the next evening; and every evening after that .

A growl of thunder issued from the black cloud above them, increasing in crescendo as if a giant drummer above beat a bass drum of titanic proportions.

'Here it comes,' said Lotibai, looking heavenward with her frightened, doe-like eyes, 'do you think there is enough time for me to get home before the rain starts?'

'What a scared little puss you are,' was Jhani's only reply.

Then the thunder came again; but now it was as if the heavens themselves were rent asunder. And the thunderclap was followed by the first few drops of rain;—not the small raindrops one sees in temperate climes, but large blobs that fell to the earth ponderously, to leave a splash of moisture on the sun-baked surface of the dry, hard land.

'Come on, let's run for it,' said Jhani lightly, springing to his feet and seizing her small hand in his large and powerful fist, 'let's see how fast you can move.'

And with the words he set forth at a trot in the direction of the old moosafarkhana standing across the road at the other end of the little park.

Lotibai tried to keep up with him, but the tightness of her sari around her thighs and calves prevented her from taking long strides. Each of her paces was forcibly short and Jhani felt that if he pulled her any harder she might trip and fall.

Halfway to the old bungalow there came a vivid flash of lightning which made itself seen in the gloom around them, cast by

the clouds that had piled themselves together overhead and now covered the whole sky under an ashy-grey pall. The lightning was followed by another resounding thunderclap, and then the reservoir of the heavens, pent-up for the past six hot, thirsty and waterless months, opened itself fully upon them. The rain descended in a solid sheet of water, enveloping everything in its opaque shroud.

The bungalow, was but 50 yards ahead, directly across the road. But they were both soaking wet by the time they reached its sheltering porch .

For a moment they halted underneath to watch the wall of rain, and the trees in the park bend under the force of the sudden gale of wind that had come with it.

The smell of the moist earth seemed indescribably refreshing to Jhani's nostrils. A farmer himself, and descended from a long line of agriculturist ancestors, he knew that the rain meant life, growth, sustenance and the means of existence to the millions of square miles of land and the teeming millions of people, that were India. Without uttering the words aloud, he breathed them, 'God be praised.'

Then, in an exuberance of childish glee and gratitude, he suddenly ran out into the rain, pirouetted around twice, and rushed back beneath the porch.

'Jhani, you ass, what are you doing?' asked Lotibai, now all attention, once again stamping her feet upon the ground in anger just as she had done seven years ago. That was a little habit of hers in registering displeasure.

Before he could say anything, she continued, 'Sometimes I think you will never grow up. You will always remain the little schoolboy I knew.'

But once more the expression of her eyes belied the severity of her tone. There was an infinite tenderness in them. A softness that almost cried aloud in its very silence the words, 'Oh Jhani; you will always remain the schoolboy that I know, and love so well.'

Jhani, however, was in no mood for sentiment just then. He shook himself, as does a wet spaniel, spraying water from his soaked clothing all around him, and over Lotibai.

She was all concern. 'Get inside the verandah this instant,' she commanded, the mother instinct, pent up inside every woman, showing itself spontaneously, 'you will catch your death of cold and probably die of pneumonia. Here, wipe your face and hair with my

hankie.'

Jhani grinned hugely at the diminutive handkerchief she offered him, a mere six-inch square of prettily coloured material. He solemnly took it from her hand and commenced to wipe his face with it and run it through his hair .

In no time the tiny handkerchief was saturated. With pretended seriousness Jhani rung out the sodden wisp of cloth between both his hands and then started wiping his head once again.

Together they walked up the four stone steps from the porch—or portico (as it is commonly known in India)—to the verandah of the building.

The moosafarkhana had been a popular construction in its time.

Built by the British over seventy years ago, it had been the one Travellers' Bungalow in the area for many, many miles around. Hence it had been a haven and an oasis for weary officials on their rounds of tour and inspection. These officials had hailed from all departments of Government Service; Military, Police, Excise, Land Revenue, Forest, the Survey Department, and such like; who had taken advantage of its existence to break journey for a few hours and camp in relative comfort before, once again, becoming exposed to the many discomforts and vicissitudes of tent life.

Rumour had it that a Viceroy had once stayed there. Certainly many Governors had, as the old bungalow registers would have proved had they been in evidence.

But those registers had long ceased to exist. Some of them had crumbled to dust; some been eaten by termites and mice. Perhaps a few had gone to light the kitchen fires of the chowkidars, who had still been kept in service to guard the bungalow long after it had stopped being used.

Now even the chowkidars had been withdrawn and the old moosafarkhana was crumbling into ruin.

Somebody had discovered that the building was unsafe due to an architectural or constructional fault—or so that somebody had said. In a great hurry Government had selected a fresh site and built a brand new bungalow. No one could tell how much pains had been expended, if at all, in considering whether the old building had been thought worth repairing.

The fact remains that the new building had mushroomed into existence while the old one was fading, slowly, into oblivion—like a weary old man, abandoned by the roadside and left to die

peacefully of old age.

The wooden doors and windows, with their frames, had long been removed; then had followed the sky-lights, and then the wooden beams and rafters in many rooms, causing the roof to cave in. But the main walls of the old building still held firm, and the roof yet covered two or three of the silent, deserted rooms, striving against the hopeless task of defying the inroads of time and the elements.

Part of the verandah roof had collapsed, part remained.

Jhani and Lotibai took shelter under the roofed portion and stood there to watch the play of the elements without.

Forked lightning streaked the ever-darkening clouds with veins of phosphorescent silver, momentarily depicting in the sky above the giant tracings of a river, mapped in the heavens, that flowed towards the earth. Then the picture vanished, to be followed in a few seconds by the ear-splitting explosion of a thunderclap. They felt the walls of the old bungalow shiver as if from an ague. The rain that had been descending in torrents, poured even harder entering through the fallen portion of the verandah roof and flooding the stone flooring on which they stood, inches deep in water.

It beat in directly through the open front; it saturated them in the form of spray. Rain, and yet more rain. Even Jhani felt the awe of the elements.

Then the wind began. They heard the banshee howl of it in the distance, coming ever closer. And it was upon them. The row of ‘neem’ trees that lined the road in front of the old bungalow suddenly bent double with the impact of it; branches and leaves were wrenched off and sailed completely out of sight. It tore through every gaping door and window opening, and through the holes and crevices in the walls and roof. It cut through their saturated clothing, numbing them with the cold so that their teeth chattered.

‘Let’s go further in,’ shouted Jhani to make himself heard above the howl of the wind and the hiss of falling rain outside, suiting the action to the word by seizing Lotibai above the elbow and piloting her before him .

They passed through the open doorway into what had once been one of the main rooms of the old moosafarkhana.

The roof here was in place, but the water flowed in through

many cracks and ran down the walls in streams of moisture.

'Across there,' indicated Jhani, still propelling the girl by her elbow, 'through that doorway. Perhaps that room leaks less.'

They entered and found themselves in some sort of anteroom. It was almost dark inside, because there were no windows, and the only way in was through the doorway they had just come. For the same reason the room was less draughty and not leaking much. They huddled against the wall together for mutual warmth, Jhani's arm protectively around Lotibai, and held tightly.

Again and again thunder exploded overhead as the storm spent its fury. The old building quivered with each impact.

Suddenly there was a rending crash as the roots of one of the neem trees, strained to the utmost by the force of the cyclone that bent the trunk and branches above, were torn out of the earth, allowing the tree to heel over and topple to the ground.

The noise startled Lotibai, who thought the roof had fallen in. She threw both arms around Jhani's neck and hid her face in his breast.

'Jhani, oh Jhani,' she whimpered.

And at that moment time seemed to stand still for Jhani. In a flash, as rapid as the flash of the lightning outside, there was born within him a new conception of the girl who clung to him so tightly.

Gone was Lotibai, his schoolgirl friend and companion, and pal of so many years.

In her place stood Lotibai, the woman. The woman whom he now desired beyond anything and anyone else in the world.

Her wet blouse and his soaked shirt were inadequate to prevent the feeling of warmth and pressure upon his chest as the firm hardness of her breasts bore against him. Her face was upturned to him, the hair plastered to her wet skull. Her eyes were closed, and her full, moist lips were temptingly close.

A wave of passion, as fierce as the tempest outside, shook Jhani. Impetuously he threw both arms around her and crushed her yet harder to him. His lips met hers hungrily in a long and passionate kiss.

'Loti darling, I love you,' he whispered tenderly, 'I don't know for how long it has been thus. But now I know it. I—I want you dearest. Now.'

'Jhani,' she replied tenderly, 'I love you too. I have always loved

you, but I hesitated to show it. I was waiting for so long, just for you to tell me.'

They kissed again and again.

Instinctively the man in Jhani knew that the resistance of the woman he held in his arms was rapidly weakening, and relentlessly, almost cruelly, he pursued his advantage.

Loti's lips opened partially, and her breath came in little gasps of passion and increasing desire.

Jhani kissed her, long and lingeringly, forcing the tip of his tongue into her mouth, where it met hers trembling with eager desire.

Still holding her tightly against him with his left forearm, Jhani removed his right hand from behind her, gently sliding his fingers down her bare side and across her abdomen. Then he ran it over her blouse and forced it down from above and under the wet cloth, to finally cup her breast within his palm.

Exultantly he felt the tautening of her nipple as her body quivered with mounting lust.

'Oh Jani, we musn't,' she breathed feebly, 'it's wrong; we musn't.'

But there was no conviction whatever in her tone.

He knew he had almost conquered, and pressed home to complete the subjugation.

His hand tightened around her bare breast, and his tongue forced itself upon hers. A moan of surrender issued feebly from between Lotibai's parted lips.

Then active lust played its part, unrestrained.

Petulantly, shamelessly, she pressed her lips more tightly upon his—lips wet with exultant submission. Her tongue slid itself past his, and into his mouth .

As if glued together, they sank silently to the ground.

Time passed, and the ecstasies of passion, as they spent each other over and over again, gradually wore away. Lotibai was the first to become aware of it. 'Good gracious, darling,' she breathed, 'what must be the time?'

It was pitch dark inside the room now.

Jhani looked at the luminous dial of his wristwatch. 'Good gracious,' he exclaimed, 'it's five minutes to eight.'

They scrambled to their feet together. All sounds of the storm had abated outside. They had been entirely oblivious to everything

but themselves.

Arm in arm they splashed through the pools of water that had formed in the driveway of the compound, and came out on to the road.

'Father will be worried,' said Lotibai, 'he will wonder what has happened to me. I have never been so late.' Then, and only then, did the full weight and significance of what they had just done forced itself into her memory.

She looked up into his face with a frightened expression in her eyes. Almost pleadingly, she asked, 'Oh Jhani. Jhani, what have we done? Why did we do it?'

At that moment Jhani was asking himself exactly the same question.

But he made a brave show at trying to calm her.

Taking the palm of her right hand in both of his, he squeezed it reassuringly, comfortingly.

Then he replied, 'I am very very sorry, Loti darling. Please forgive me. I don't know what happened, but I just could not control myself.'

'Don't blame yourself entirely, Jhani dearest,' she answered forthrightly, 'I was as much at fault myself'; adding lamely, 'it takes two hands to clap, you know.'

They walked on a few paces, each lost in thoughts of their own.

Then Lotibai asked, somewhat apologetically, 'What do we do now? '

But Jhani had regained his usual high spirits. He laughed lightly at her question.

'How silly! What do you think? We will get married of course.'

Loti thrilled to his words, and hugged his arm tightly against her breast.

'Tonight won't be advisable,' continued Jhani, 'but first thing tomorrow morning I'll come across to your place with my dad and tell your old man I'm going to marry you.'

Loti was delighted.

A few minutes later they had reached her home.

Lotibai was a bit anxious as to how her father, Kumar, would look upon her late return. The clock on the wall in the drawing room showed it was exactly 8.20 p.m.

But Fate had decided to be kind to the lovers, at least for that night. The servant who opened the door informed her that her

father had gone out in a car with a friend who had called for him just before the storm started, and had not yet returned home.

Breathing a sigh of thankfulness that they had crossed the first hurdle, the lovers kissed each other quickly as soon as the servant had gone inside, and Jhani turned to go home and convey the good news to his father.

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Balaji was happy; he was gloatingly happy.

He was delighted because the rain had not only watered his twelve acres of land plentifully, but had filled the small pond he had dug at the further end of it.

That water would be a boon to the hundred or so domestic ducks he kept. They would swim in it all day, and lay eggs in the grass on the banks at night.

And he would sell those eggs.

Sitting on the floor in the verandah of his little home, with his feet folded crosswise and tucked beneath him, he closed his eyes and gave himself up to reverie .

At the age of fifty-nine, Balaji could by no means be considered an old man. Tall and well-boned, the strenuous and healthy life he had led since a lad, when his own father had died suddenly from cholera while the epidemic had raged and left this farm in his sole charge, had kept him fit and busy and happy.

Thrown so unexpectedly upon his own resources, he had manfully shouldered the burden and worked hard upon the land since that very day.

Often indeed had the wheel of fortune doled out hardships and calamity to his lot. The water in his well sometimes dried up. The rains had failed; or had come out of season. Occasionally there had been too much of it. Twice a crop-pest had visited his land, killing the harvest before it was ripe in front of his very eyes.

But not for nothing had his father endowed him with a square, determined jaw; hazel-brown frank eyes; a jovial pleasant, face; an overflowing, optimistic nature; and an indomitable determination to win through. Not only did he look to have these qualities; he possessed all of them abundantly.

Early in life he married the rather thin girl his father had chosen for him, but had not lived to see him marry. She had been the

daughter of another farmer, and so she had fitted perfectly into the hard life led by those who till the soil in India. She had proved herself to be the very best life-mate, companion and wife a man could ever have wished for.

In times of trouble and misfortune she comforted, consoled and encouraged him. At other times when things were going well, she praised him for the hard work he had done on the land, while she put something by for a rainy day.

Jhani had been their only child, and they had stinted themselves to educate him at the best school in the village.

One night, almost exactly four years ago, Fate had struck old Balaji the cruellest of blows, and incidentally the first and only one to which he had nearly succumbed.

His wife, Meerabai, had gone outside the house to answer the call of Nature and had trod upon a cobra with her bare feet. The cobra had promptly bitten her .

There was no doctor nearby in those days who knew the value of antiserum treatment. Neither was there any anti-venine serum available.

It had happened in the dead of night.

He had summoned the village magician, or 'mantram-man' as he was called, who claimed the powers of a witch doctor and assured Balaji that he could, and would, shortly cure the patient.

The magician had seized one of Balaji's fowls, plucked off the feathers from around its anus, and applied the vent itself to the two fang-marks made by the cobra near her ankle, in turn.

He claimed this treatment would draw out the venom.

Then he said he noticed the fowl was turning black about its head owing to the snake poison it had absorbed. He cut the fowl's throat. He said that by sacrificing its life the gods would spare the woman's.

He muttered mantras.

He set fire to a white powder that had flared up in a glaringly bright flame. That was to frighten away the evil spirits.

But nevertheless Meerabai, his wife, had died.

That was the time Balaji had lost interest in the farm, in his son and himself, and with life altogether for some months. He had contemplated throwing himself down his own well.

But his dominant nature reasserted itself. He won through, overcame his despondency, struggled on.

Now things were a bit easier. His son, Jhani, had grown up and helped him on the farm every day. Balaji was pleased that the boy had taken to farm life voluntarily. So many of the lads of his age these days were averse to it. They clamoured to migrate to the big cities and work in some industrial concern there.

They had said it brought in more money. Balaji knew for a fact it brought in more leisure—and more trouble and evil habits with that leisure. But his Jhani had not done these things. On the contrary, he had shaped himself admirably to life on the land.

Balaji was very proud of Jhani. He thought the world of him .

The old man continued his reflections, eyes closed tightly to concentrate his thoughts and keep them from going astray.

Jhani was nineteen years old now. High time he got married. He, Balaji himself, would have to look for a suitable wife for the boy.

And, by God, she would have to be really worthy of his Jhani.

For one thing, she would have to bring a big dowry of money and jewels with her. The former would be used for remodelling the farm and digging another well.

For another, she would have to be the daughter of a farmer herself, just as his beloved Meerabai had been. Then only could he ensure that the girl would be able to adapt herself to this life of toil and sweat. No woman from a city; no daughter of some worthless, white collared town man would he permit Jhani to marry.

For only too well did Balaji know the uselessness of a town-girl when she was brought face to face with hard manual labour on the soil of the land.

Footsteps splashed suddenly through the mire and water outside, and a cheery voice called through the darkness, ‘Hello dad; are you asleep?’

Balaji opened his eyes. There was the ghost of a smile of pride upon his face.

For that voice was Jhani’s.

A moment later his son took the three steps leading up to his verandah in a single stride and came to a halt, smiling happily, before him.

Balaji thought his son was happy because of the rain.

He said, ‘A lovely downpour, eh, Jhani?’

To which Jhani replied spontaneously, ‘Hang the rain; I have wonderful news for you.’

Balaji frowned noticeably.

'Hang the rain!' he exclaimed incredibly. 'Why, this downpour is the best thing that could have happened today.'

'Not on your life,' returned Jhani promptly, 'I have much better news for you—and far more important, too. I am going to be married. '

'Married did you say?' asked Balaji, not believing his own ears. And then again, openly dubious, 'Married?'

'Yes,' burst from Jhani exultantly, 'to the sweetest and best girl in all the world; Lotibai.'

Then Jhani continued excitedly, and before his father could put in a word. 'Do you know, dad, a wonderful thing happened today? I have always loved this girl, yet I didn't know it myself until tonight.

'It came down to rain, and we took shelter in the old moosafarkhana. Then suddenly, I—I—; well, I discovered I loved her, and am going to marry her soon.'

'That's rather unusual,' said his father; unfolding his legs from underneath himself and slowly rising to his feet, 'what led up to causing you to make such a sudden discovery?'

Jhani blushed beneath his brown skin. How could he possibly tell his own father what had happened.

'I—I really don't know myself, dad. You see, as I said, we had been talking in the park when it suddenly came down to rain. We rushed into the old moosafarkhana, as it was the closest building. There we remained till the storm had passed. In the meantime, we were just—well, talking. From the things Lotibai and I said to each other, we discovered we are deeply in love and wish to get married.

'Tomorrow I want you to come with me, dad, to ask old Kumar for his consent to marry Loti. It will be just a formal request of course as he is bound to agree. But we would like both our fathers to meet and to give us their blessings.'

'I see,' said Balaji, thoughtfully, 'in my time a boy and girl did not suddenly decide to get married while they were sheltering from a storm in a deserted building.'

He glanced up. Jhani thought he detected a knowing smile at the comers of his father's mouth. Could the old man have guessed what had really happened?

'Their respective parents arranged the match before ever they met,' continued Balaji .

'Nevertheless, I for one realise the times are changing. Nor am I

bigotted or narrow-minded. I do not object to you choosing your own mate.

'But the vital question, Jhani, is just this. I know Lotibai is a pretty girl and a nice girl, and a decent respectable girl.

'I also know your marriage to her will bring in a considerable dowry. Her father, that merchant-contractor, Kumar, is a very wealthy man. I for one will bargain most rigidly for a large dowry, you may be very certain of it.

'But the all-important question, my son, is just this.

'Will Lotibai prove to be a good wife to a farmer-boy, like you? Is she not just a town-bred girl; rich, lazy, indifferent and probably unfaithful, too, along with it? Will she be able to stick the hard life by the side of her husband?

'Like your dear mother of ever-blessed memory endured it, along with me.' Then he added in an undertone, 'May God rest her soul in eternal peace.'

Jhani had listened to his father's words with growing impatience. To him it appeared ridiculous, if not sacrilegious, for old Balaji to even entertain such thoughts.

'Oh don't be so silly and old-fashioned, dad,' he cried petulantly, 'I have known Lotibai for years. For one thing, she is a plain, simple girl with no pretensions whatever. Surely we are not going to imagine faults in her just because her father happens to be a very rich man?

'Besides, we love each other too deeply for either of us to ever think of being unfaithful.' He uttered the words with an air of finality and as if the last word on the subject had been spoken.

After that they ate their evening meal of vegetable curry and the chappatties which Balaji had prepared, almost in silence, each engrossed in his own thoughts.

The old man was thinking to himself: is this going to be for the better or the worse?

After mother died we both managed the farm more like pals than like father and son. There was perfect understanding and never discord. Jhani would work on the land while I attended to the household chores. Occasionally we would change over; and he would do the cooking while I pottered about on the land. Either way, there was always time between us for both duties and a chat when they were done.

Now this woman is coming along. She will claim his time and

his attention both day and night. I will have to attend to the farm all by myself—and I am growing old. It may be too much of a burden for me at this age. The work may prove too hard.

If I call my son away from her, this woman will not like it. She will whisper sweet nothings in his ear and he will hurry back to her arms.

Worse still, this Lotibai is the offspring of one of the 'higher-set' of human beings—the hated rich—who never seem to work by the sweat of their brow like we have to work, but to whom money appears to come nevertheless—just like that, as if attracted by a magnet.

Would she make a good wife for his Jhani? Would she be able to accustom herself to sitting on the floor of their little home, and not on chairs, as she was wont to do in her father's mansion? Would she sleep on the ground, or would she want her spring-cot, probably equipped with a mattress of silk-cotton, gathered from the pods of the silk-cotton trees that grow in the jungle not so far away? Above all, would she soil her beautiful sarees and her prettily-manicured fingernails, toiling in their kitchen, or sitting on the floor grinding the 'curry-stuff' between the flat stone and the elongated oval stone roller which went with it, and with which the kitchens of the poor in India are equipped?

Would she do all these things?

Balaji doubted it; and in his heart he found himself resenting the advent of this Lotibai, or for the matter of that the intrusion of any woman into the home for his son as a wife.

But then, another thought came to him. In his memory, not clouded by the mists of forgetfulness but wondrous clear as if she stood before him at that very moment, appeared the face of a woman; rather lean of countenance but with lustrous, frank, honest brown eyes; a tiny, rosebud mouth, topped by an equally tiny nose and a delightfully rounded chin with a dimple in it .

The face was that of his beloved Meerabai as she was on the day he had married her.

His old eyes misted with tears as he allowed himself to float on the tide of memories. The sweet memories of what had been; those days of long ago that were so dear, so tender to him; days that had gone forever; that could never come back; but that brought with them recollections as if of yesterday; precious moments he relived and treasured and would keep sacred with him deeply hidden till

his span of life ran out and he would once again be with his darling; this time reunited, never to part.

Old Balaji thought of those days.

He remembered that, far from hindering him with his work on the land, Meerabai had actually helped him with her own hands to plough to sow, and to reap the harvest. She had inspired him in everything he did.

And he also remembered the nests of the birds that were built in almost every tree and bush, on and around his boundaries, at the coming of summertime. The females would hatch the eggs while the males fed their mates. When the 'bacchas' (young) were out of their shells, both father-bird and mother-bird would feed the little family.

How sad had been the two bulbuls one day, years ago, when a sparrow-hawk had raided their nest and gobbled up their young. They had shrieked shrilly for help—when none had come. Their screechings had mingled with the wails of the last of their fledglings as it had been carried away in the cruel talons of the hawk. That incident had been a reminder of life—and sudden death.

He remembered that Meerabai had heard those sounds. She had seen the little tragedy enacted. Too late, she had rushed out of the house in an effort to drive away the predatory hawk. Then she had wept bitterly.

Even the hated crows showed love for their young and for each other at nesting time.

Then Balaji realised that it was the way of life—the rule of creation. The male and the female would meet; court each other; procreate their species; and die themselves. It had been happening since the world began. It would continue to happen, till the world ended.

Who was he, Balaji, stupid selfish old fool, to resent his son finding his own mate? Had he not fallen deeply in love himself with Meerabai?

Balaji snivelled, slyly wiped the comers of his eyes with the back of his gnarled right hand when Jhani was not looking, and munched his curry and chappatty, almost happily.

He had made up his mind now. Most certainly he would do his best to help Jhani to marry this girl of his choice. As for the rest, it lay in God's hands.

Father and son lay awake that night till a very late hour, their beds spread on the floor of their little living room.

The frogs sent up a cacophonious croaking from the many pools of water that had filled every depression and hollow in the land after the storm that had come earlier that evening.

It was a chorus hideous to listen to. The ululations of individual bullfrogs attained a pitch of noise that made them heard above the vibrations of the refrain, voiced by hundreds of the slimy creatures as they sat on their little haunches, half-buried in the mud by the waterside. The sound rose to a crescendo; fell in pitch and then rose again.

The humble creatures were thanking their Creator for the rain and the water that fell with it and in which they were enjoying themselves so happily.

Balaji, as he fell asleep, was thankful too.

But Jhani could not sleep. He had no ears for the chorus of the frogs, nor any thought for the rain.

All he could think of was Loti's beautiful face, almost unseen in the darkness of the old room in the moosafarkhana; her water-soaked hair; the passion of her kisses as her lips had clung to his; the plump mounds of luscious flesh that were her breasts under the pressure of his eager, questing, demanding hands; the upright tightness of her erect nipples; and the little bites she had given his lips and ears and cheek as she had attained each orgasm in her lustful passion .

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It was nine o'clock the following morning when Jhani and his father reached the gate before the mansion-like building that was Kumar's residence. The sun was shining brightly from a cloudless sky. The leaves of the trees looked green and fresh after their recent washing in the rain. Even the earth smelled fragrant, and seemed alive with the promise of growth to come.

The farmer instinct, inborn in Balaji, told him that such a cloudless sky and the bright sunshine would probably bring with them another downpour of rain the following night. He was delighted at the thought.

The 'mali' (gardener), who was busy digging among the flower-beds saw them, opened the gate and asked whom they wanted.

Loti saw them too; through the iron bars and glass panes of the front windows that were always closed in her father's house—

closed, for fear of thieves coming through them.

Like Jhani, she had lain awake long into the previous night, exulting in the love she had so suddenly discovered but now knew she had always entertained for him since that day years ago, when Jhani had pulled her hair before schooltime and she had not sneaked on him.

Over and over again during the night she had relived those hectic moments of passion they had experienced together the evening before, oblivious to the violence of the storm and the threat offered by the tumbling roof of the old moosafarkhana.

Her eyes gleamed with welcome, love, and lust too, as she opened the front door for Jhani and his father and waved them into the living room.

'Dad, this is Loti, whom I have been telling you about. The most wonderful girl in the world that I am going to marry.' Jhani spoke simply to his father, but his gaze was only for his sweetheart.

(It is considered very immodest and is against Indian custom for a boy and girl, or husband and wife for that matter, to embrace and kiss each other in public or before their elders; even their own parents.)

The old man acknowledged the introduction with an inclination of his head and an expansive smile. Loti returned it, demurely, with both hands folded, palms together, before her face.

Then she said, 'Be seated, please; I will call my father.'

With a flitting smile for Jhani and a bewitching glance at him, she drew aside the brocaded silken curtain hanging at the entrance to the door leading to the next room, and disappeared from sight.

Jhani waved his father to a chair and sat in another himself.

Balaji sat down very slowly and cautiously on the edge of the chair which Jhani had indicated to him, as if he feared that the act of sitting on it was sacrilegious, or that it might collapse with his weight.

Very obviously old Balaji was quite unaccustomed to sitting on chairs.

He was plainly nervous, too. He fidgeted and moved himself about and glanced alternatively at the large Japanese wall-clock hanging on the opposite side of the room and at the doorway through which the girl had just passed.

The room in which they were seated was a lofty one, with a ceiling of wooden panels, betraying the style of architecture in

vogue in India about a century ago. From external appearances at least the remainder of the house had been renovated and modernised. But this room, for some reason, had been allowed to remain untouched except for the flooring which had been changed to one of polished white tiles.

There was a settee covered with green velvet at the further end of the room; a sofa and two padded chairs beside it, all in green, at the opposite end. Three comfortable armchairs made out of Singapore cane and painted green also, occupied intermediary positions. Jhani sat on one of these and Balaji on the other.

A heavily ornamented table, with top of brass and legs of mahogany, from Travancore, stood in the centre of the room. On the table was a brass vase crammed with multicoloured zenias from the garden. A radio, worked by an automobile battery, stood in the corner near the brocaded curtain .

Nearly ten minutes dragged by, and then they heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Abruptly the curtain was pushed aside and Kumar entered the room. Lotibai followed silently behind him.

Of medium height like his daughter, Kumar carried his age—which was forty-eight years—well. His step was firm and brisk, his frame thin but well-set, his shoulders squared under his tightly-fitting black silk coat with its neat row of buttons in front reaching from knee-length right up to the close-set, ‘dog collar’ at his neck.

His head was covered with carefully-brushed black hair, parted in the middle and mottled at the temples, where it was greying. Sharp eyebrows were raised, a trifle interrogatively above his keenly-piercing slate-grey eyes. An aquiline nose; thin-lipped, rather tight mouth; and a determined chin gave his clean-shaven face a terse, business-like expression.

His brightly-polished brown shoes creaked audibly below the tight-fitting, white-cotton jodhpurs that bulged above his knees.

Lotibai stepped forward and said in her musical voice, ‘Daddy; this is Jhani’s father, Shri Balaji; and of course, Jhani.’ And then to Balaji and Jhani, she said formally, ‘Please meet my father, Shri Kumar.’

Balaji and Jhani stood up from their seats with their palms together before their faces and bowed slightly in respect. Kumar acknowledged their greeting with a wave of his right hand in the direction of the chairs they had been occupying.

‘Please be seated and be comfortable,’ he said graciously. Then,

addressing Jhani, ‘You, of course, I know young man, as my daughter’s schoolboy friend. She often speaks of you, and of how you both meet and chat every evening in the marketplace. Don’t you ever grow tired?’

He smiled slightly and in almost the same breath, addressed Balaji.

‘It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Shri Balaji. A real pleasure.

‘Would you both care for a cup of tea?’

Father and son hesitated to accept the invitation. They were unaccustomed to society manners, being just farmers .

Kumar apprised himself of the situation at a glance. Turning to his daughter he asked, ‘Lotibai, will you make us and yourself four cups of that delicious tea that only you can make?’

He was smiling fondly and proudly upon her as she left the room.

A rather strained silence fell upon the three of them after that. Kumar glanced expectantly at his visitors. It was apparent they had come to tell or ask him something. Otherwise they would never have called at his house. Perhaps they were going to ask for a loan.

Jhani looked at his father. It was clearly Balaji’s duty, as his parent, to announce the purpose of their call.

Balaji had been preparing himself, since early that morning and all along the way to Kumar’s house, as to what he would say. Now he was tongue-tied, however. He did not know quite how he should begin.

Noticing the glances between father and son, Kumar coughed discreetly. Then, to ease the tension and help them to start talking, he asked politely, ‘To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, gentlemen?’

Balaji looked flustered. Both Kumar and his own son were gazing expectantly at him. He would have to say something.

So he said, ‘I—er, that is to say we, er—came to ask—rather to tell you—,’ and then he broke off into silence. A few seconds later he asked, apologetically, ‘I hope we are not disturbing you or keeping you from some engagement?’

Kumar smiled tolerantly. He knew the old man wanted to say something important but he did not quite know how he should commence. Well, let him take his own time. Rather unusually, he found himself not very busy at the moment and could spare the few

minutes it would take these two country yokels, seated so obviously ill at ease before him, to sort themselves out and gain sufficient courage to come out with whatever it was they had in their minds.

But when old Balaji eventually did blurt out the purpose of the visit Kumar received the rudest shock of his life.

With the true style of direct talk which is the stock-in-trade of all people who live in the country and on the land, Balaji said slowly and distinctly .

'My son, Jhani, wishes to marry your daughter and I have come here to negotiate the terms of the marriage with you.'

Kumar jerked himself bolt upright in his chair. There was an expression of profound astonishment on his countenance and in his voice, as he asked incredulously, 'What is that you said? Say it again?'

Balaji looked a little disconcerted. Perhaps he had not spoken loud enough for this man to hear.

So he repeated what he had just said, and this time sonorously, 'My son wishes to marry your daughter. I have come to negotiate terms and make arrangements.'

Kumar looked thoroughly startled. He glanced from father to son. In Jhani's forthright countenance he saw confirmed the statement that his father had just made.

As if speaking to himself, Kumar repeated flatly, ruminatingly. 'You have come to negotiate terms and make arrangements.'

And as if he had been asked this question, Balaji replied with alacrity, 'That's right. That is what we have come for.'

Kumar glanced at each of them in turn, his face becoming confused with rage. Were they really mad? Were they trying to have a joke at his expense?

Perhaps the fools were actually in earnest.

He hesitated another couple of seconds. Then made his decision.

Whether they were mad, joking or serious, the sooner he set these country bumpkins right and made himself clear to them, the better.

Kumar leaned forward in his chair and commenced to speak, plainly and deliberately. 'If you really mean what you are asking and this is not a silly joke, the answer is very emphatically, "NO".'

It was now the turn of father and son to register surprise. Before they could recover, Kumar went on, speaking with devastating frankness.

‘In the first place, on the very face of things, the idea is absurd. My daughter comes of a respectable family—of genteel folk if you understand what I mean—she is a lady. Your son and yourself are just—well, just farmers .

Secondly, my daughter is accustomed to living in luxury. She does no work herself. The servants attend to all that. If she was to marry below her status—into a poor family of farmers—she would have to break her back working all her life. She was not born to enter into a future of that sort.

‘Thirdly, I have high ideals and big plans for her. It is my intention to marry her to some rich zamindar, or big merchant or businessman, who will not only maintain her in the standard of luxury and comfort in which she has been brought up all her life, but who will be of direct assistance to me, through his influence and his money, to further expand and increase my own business in this town and elsewhere.’

Kumar stopped talking to take a deep breath. He was distinctly ruffled. Then, as deliberately as he had addressed them, he recommenced speaking as if to himself.

‘I looked upon this friendship as a merely platonic acquaintance. A schoolboy and girl comradeship. Never did I suspect there was anything more behind it.’

Then, addressing Jhani, he asked, ‘Since how long have you both come to be in love?’

‘Why, since last night,’ answered Jhani truthfully, ‘the storm…’

‘Tell me, what happened last night? What had the storm to do with it?’ In his anxiety, Kumar leaned forward in his chair.

‘The storm broke and we took shelter in the old moosafarkhana. We—well, we were just talking and—and we—we discovered we were in love with each other, had always been as a matter of fact, and wanted to get married.’

‘So,’ Kumar almost hissed the words, ‘it took the storm and the old moosafarkhana to make you know you were in love, eh?’

He sprang to his feet and strode up to Jhani, standing defiantly over him.

‘Tell me, young man; and tell the truth. Else I will kill you. What else happened between the two of you in the old moosafarkhana last night. ’

Balaji had been listening to the dialogue between his son and this man, without quite grasping what was happening. But when

Kumar strode up to Jhani and said something about killing him, the old farmer, complacent till then, lost his temper.

He also leapt up and faced Kumar, their angry countenances but inches apart.

'Did you say something about killing, O feeble little man?' he asked with contempt. 'When it comes to killing, only men can do that. Men like farmers. Men like us. Not stinking little rats like you, who hide in rich houses and fight boldly—with the pen and tongue.'

Just then Lotibai re-entered the room, carrying a tray on which were set four inlaid silver cups brimming with steaming tea. Taking in the scene at a glance, she came to an abrupt halt.

Kumar swung on her.

'What did this young brat do to you in the old moosafarkhana last night?' he thundered.

How did her father come to discover what had happened, Loti wondered to herself in amazement? Had Jhani really been so shameless as to tell him what he and she had done last night?

She released her hold on the tray and it crashed to the polished floor, throwing the cups in all directions with the hot tea that was inside them.

'Tell me,' shouted Kumar inexorably.

Lotibai raised both her hands to cover her face that had crimsoned in shame. Then she turned and ran out of the room abruptly.

Kumar guessed what had happened to his daughter the previous evening, and guessed correctly.

He knew that she was no longer a virgin and that her marketable value as a bride with which to attract a rich and influential husband who could directly help him—Kumar—to expand his business still more, had dropped to zero.

Turning to Balaji and Jhani, Kumar gritted between his clenched teeth .

'Get out, the pair of you. You have ruined my daughter's whole future. You will never see her again.'

They turned and left the house without a backward glance.

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That evening Jhani waited in vain for his sweetheart. She was neither to be seen at the marketplace, nor did she come to their

trysting-bench at the park. All day he had been disconsolate. That night he was like a madman.

Early the following morning Kumar took his daughter away. He himself drove the car that carried her. Where they went nobody knew. But when he returned after a full week, he came alone.

During this period Jhani had grown more and more morose. No longer did he do any work on the farm as he was wont to do previously. No longer was he interested in anything—not even in himself.

Old Balaji had made several attempts to console him. It was quite useless.

'Jhani, why do you fret so? Did I not warn you to have nothing to do with these high-class people? The rich are proud because of their money. Never content with what they have got, they always try to get more. Not caring for a home nor happiness, they engage themselves in torturous schemes to make more money. They do not know the pleasure that is to be derived from honest, hard work, nor the place of a woman in the home.

'Come, cheer up Jhani. There are as many fish in the sea as ever came out of it. I will find a fine, buxom country-born lass for you who will make you a good wife and a faithful companion. Moreover, she won't be afraid of hard work.'

'But dad, my Loti was all those things and more,' Jhani had argued, 'Now that she has gone and I don't know where, I love her more than ever, nor do I want to look upon any other woman.'

A full month passed during which he hardly spoke. For hours in the evening he would sit on the front step of the verandah of their little home and gaze into space as the velvety shades of night fell. Where can my Loti be, he was thinking. It was with the greatest of difficulty that old Balaji could get him to give a hand towards doing any work on their land. Nor would he help with the cooking.

One day there was a great hubbub in the town of Bhind. There came the tramp of marching men and a whole company of armed police entered the market square. That night they camped under the large banyan trees that grew beside the bund of the tank to the north of the town and less than a mile out.

As was to be expected, the little township was agog with rumours and conjectures as to the reason for their presence. Little by little the story came out.

The notorious dacoit, Man Singh, had again raided and captured

a prominent zamindar who lived about nine miles out of town. He had demanded a ransom of fifty thousand rupees for the captive's return. The money had been paid and the zamindar had been sent back, safe and sound.

Soon after another dacoit, whose name was Charna, and who was one of Man Singh's chief lieutenants, ambushed and captured a landowner while returning from his extensive estates with the rents he had collected.

Not content with looting all the rent money, Charna had held the landlord to ransom and had demanded thirty thousand rupees from his family for his safe return.

The family had hesitated to pay, and the stipulated time and place found the ransom unpaid.

Next morning a 'dhoby's' (washerman's) donkey was observed grazing placidly in front of the landlord's house. Tied to the back of the donkey was a bundle.

Passers-by noticed a repulsive smell coming from whatever was in the bundle, and they commented among themselves about it. By eventide the stench became unbearable.

Somebody with a stronger stomach than his neighbours, removed the bundle from the donkey's back and opened it .

Out fell the landlord's head. It had been skilfully severed with one blow from some sharp instrument.

A platoon of police had been sent out to try and capture this Charna. But not for nothing had he been called Charna, the 'Ferocious'.

The platoon had been surrounded and attacked as they slept by the riverside at night, after the sentries had been overpowered.

Everyone of them had been killed and beheaded after that. The corpses had been thrown into the river. The heads of the policemen, impaled on pointed bamboos, had been arranged in two ranks with their sergeant in front.

Consequent upon these atrocities, there had been a panic on the part of the wealthier class of people, nearly all of whom fled the area. Batches of armed police had been stationed at strategic outposts to act as spearheads for the all-out drive against the nest of bandits that was to follow.

But in the marketplace, and in the wretched hovels of the poorer people, the talk was always the same. On every hand one heard words of sympathy and of praise for the dacoit bands.

‘By Krishna,’ a Hindu said, ‘if only there were more like Man Singh and his merry men in this land of India, groaning as it is under oppression from these rich landlords. Such bastards would be eliminated and there would be plenty of land available for the poor.’

‘By Allah,’ returned a Moslem, ‘this Man Singh is a just man—and a brave one. Last month he made fifty thousand rupees as ransom on the fat zamindar from the Kohlibad area, and last week he sent half of it in donation to the new school for the blind, at Alipore’.

Jhani heard the stories in the marketplace and his whole attention became rivetted by them. They caused his blood to tingle. Here were men who hated the rich—just as he now hated them! Men like Kumar, who had blasted his life—and Loti’s life! What if he could join such men. He would cheerfully devote the remainder of his days to helping to punish these monied classes who behaved so mercilessly towards the poor .

Well, why shouldn’t he join them?

Hundreds had done so already. That was what had enabled the outlaw bands to grow so greatly in numbers. And if others had done it, why could not he?

That very evening Jhani made up his mind. He would seek out the bandit leader, offer him his faithful services, and devote the rest of his lifetime to killing the rich.

After their meal of wheat-gruel, cheese and chappatties, with boiled cauliflower, and washed down by tea, Jhani said to old Balaji, his father.

‘Dad, I am going away for sometime. I cannot tell you where. I don’t know myself. Nor can I tell you when I will return; that is, if ever I do return.

‘I am sorry to leave you all alone, dad. I know I am not worthy to be called your son after letting you down like this. But I just have no interest in life after Loti went away. If I remain any longer in this place, every nook and corner of which holds such dear memories of her for me, I feel I shall go mad. So, dear dad, it’s best I go.’

Like all people who live close to nature, Balaji had understood perfectly. He remembered his own feelings when his wife, Meerabai, Jhani’s mother, had died. He had been inconsolable. Now Balaji thought Jhani was going away to search for his lost

sweetheart.

'Go son; and may God be with you,' he had replied. 'Take the hundred rupees which I shall presently give you. It will help you on your journey. Only think of me and the old farm, sometimes. Remember we will be always waiting for you to return, son. And till that day, look after yourself, my boy. Trust in God, and He will not fail you.'

After that the old man had broken down and wept bitterly. So had Jhani.

Nevertheless he was up with the dawn next day. He rolled a few clothes into a bundle and took the solitary five-rupee note he had been saving up. It would suffice for his wayside expenses until such time as he could contact the dacoits .

With a brave face and dry eye, albeit his hand shook terribly, Balaji held out the hundred-rupee note he had hidden away for so long against a rainy day.

Jhani smiled, but declined to accept it.

'No, thank you dad. You need it and the farm needs it. I am young and strong and can work for my living.' And then the final moment of parting had come. They embraced and kissed each other on both cheeks.

Resolutely Jhani picked up his bundle of clothes, slung it over his shoulder, and walked away never once looking back. For if he did, the sight of the old farmlands so familiar to him since the days of his youth, and of his grief-stricken father standing weeping at the boundary of the fields—his own fields—and the thousand-and-one recollections of the town that held such precious memories to him of his beloved Loti, might cause him at the last moment to weaken and abandon his plan of adventure and revenge.

That must never be. He would devote his lifetime to punishing the rich, to scourging them, to robbing and torturing them, and to killing them; as many of them and as fast as he could, and in the most horrible manner possible.

For had not one of them taken away his Loti?

Jhani wandered for days after that, working where he could for his living and begging when there was no work to be had.

He crossed the Chambal River one morning and turned towards the ravines.

'Brother, whom do you seek?' asked the boatman curiously, as Jhani set foot on the further bank.

‘I seek Man Singh and his men,’ Jhani had replied briefly.

The boatman held his breath in amazement. Then he asserted, ‘You are either quite mad, which I think to be ‘the case; or you are very foolish; or you are very brave. I really don’t know which.’

Then he pushed his long pole into the muddy bottom of the river and commenced the slow journey back .

Not knowing his way, Jhani moved forward in a direction at right angles to the river.

It was long after nine o’clock when something struck the ground in front of him, releasing a spurt of dust, before it sped onward with a vicious, twanging whine. Split seconds later, he heard the report of the rifle.

Jhani knew he had been fired at, undoubtedly by some dacoit sentry.

He did not hide or attempt to take cover. He just stood still and raising both arms, extended them high above his head, calling aloud in Rajasthani, ‘Do not shoot me. I am a friend who comes in peace, voluntarily. I seek Man Singh.’

Another bullet hit the ground at precisely the same spot as had its predecessor.

Jhani knew that the marksman who could accomplish the feat of placing two bullets in exactly the same place, would not have missed hitting him—unless he had really intended to do so.

No doubt the hidden sniper had meant him to understand exactly that, which was the reason for the second shot.

He continued to remain quite stationary with arms held aloft and extended, while he went on shouting the same message that he had already yelled.

From somewhere ahead a voice hailed him, ‘Keep advancing with your arms aloft. If you attempt to lower them, you are a dead man.’

Jhani did as he was told. He couldn’t see anyone.

After a time his arms began to ache, but he knew he dared not drop them. The sniper no doubt had him covered all this time and would not hesitate to fulfil his threat if he attempted to put them down.

The ache increased, and Jhani was on the point of shouting aloud that he could no longer keep his arms aloft when, from the middle of a bush a little to his right stood up an unkempt figure, with a rifle to its shoulder pointed directly at him. The man had on

a black skullcap and was wearing a torn khaki shirt and shorts .

'Who are you and what are you doing here?' the man called.

'Friend, I will tell you everything. Only permit me to lower my arms awhile. They are paining terribly and I cannot keep them up any longer,' pleaded Jhani.

'How do I know you are not carrying a "pocket-bundook" (a revolver)?' asked the ruffian.

'I am unarmed and come in peace. I seek Man Singh to offer my services to him. But please let me lower my arms while we talk. I am suffering agony holding them up like this.'

'Alright,' conceded the wild-looking sentry, 'but before doing so, remember this. One false move and the vultures will feed upon you this very day and the jackals tonight.'

But Jhani had already dropped his arms to his sides. He sighed in relief.

'You are a police spy, no doubt,' asserted the man flatly. 'That is why you are asking me to direct you to Man Singh. Do you think I am such a fool?'

'No brother, you are quite mistaken. I came here to join the dacoits because I want to wreak vengeance upon the rich who have done me a great wrong.'

'You will have to tell that story to my chief,' rejoined his captor. 'You cannot meet the Maharaj now, but I will conduct you to my leader.'

'I shall walk behind you with this rifle cocked,' he continued. 'Try any tricks and it will go off, immediately. Do you understand? Now, get going.'

So Jhani walked ahead with the bandit behind him.

They crossed two ravines and then a voice hailed them from the summit of the third nullah. 'Halt,' it commanded, 'and give the password.'

'Snakes come out at dusk,' shouted his companion promptly, from behind.

'Advance slowly,' advised the second sentry from the hilltop, at the same moment showing himself for the first time .

They climbed to the top of that hillock, intersected the next depression, and went up the fourth hill.

As they reached its crest they looked down on an encampment of some three dozen men who were squatting or lying on the open ground. Jhani noted that it was evidently a mobile unit that he saw

before him, as there were no signs of tents or other equipment to indicate the dacoits were camped there for any length of time.

A big man with a black beard, the usual twirled moustache but no whiskers, sat a little apart from the main group. He wore loose white cotton trousers and a dirty grey shirt. On top of his head, appearing rather out of proportion in its smallness to the rest of his size, was a tightly-wound turban of brown cloth.

Prodding him with the end of the muzzle of his rifle, the sentry directed him towards the big man, who stood up as Jhani approached.

He was a hefty, muscular brute, standing well over six feet and a little taller than Jhani himself. He had cruel eyes, a long, predatory nose, and lips that were compressed into practically a straight line.

'What do you want?' His voice was loud and hard, and had that imperious note that indicated its owner was accustomed to implicit obedience.

Before Jhani could reply, the man with the rifle behind him, no doubt anxious to justify the capture he had made, chipped in.

'I saw this man wandering towards the ravines from my post, Charna Sahib. So I fired a shot to warn him. He started shouting back that he wanted to see our Maharaj and join us. So I brought him in.'

The big man so addressed did not answer the sentry, but continued to glare at the prisoner.

Jhani had heard the name by which the giant had been addressed and knew he stood in the presence of the much dreaded Charna, called the 'Ferocious'; the most terrible of all Man Singh's lieutenants; a man credited with superhuman courage, but no qualities of mercy whatever. He began to feel afraid.

'I have come, Sir, to offer my humble services to the great Man Singh. I have suffered a grevious wrong at the hands of a rich man, and I want to wreak vengeance against him and all his class.' Impetuously Jhani had uttered the words while he met the cruel glance.

'What if you are a police agent?' asked Charna.

'Then you may kill me, at once,' returned Jhani promptly.

The dacoit chieftain looked him up and down for a few minutes. Then he asked, 'What is your name, and what is your trade?'

'My name is Jhani. I am a farmer. My father is Balaji and we own twelve acres of land close to the town of Bhind.'

‘Be seated and tell me your story,’ invited Charna, reseating himself, cross-legged, upon the ground a couple of yards distant.

Jhani accepted the invitation and then embarked upon a detailed account of his problem.

The dacoit listened till he had finished, and then smiled expansively, at the same time clapping his hand upon Jhani’s shoulder in a friendly gesture.

‘Silly boy,’ he said, ‘is that your only trouble? Why, it is no problem at all.

‘That is what I like about farmers as a class of people,’ he continued, ‘they are simple and straightforward. Fancy getting so upset about all this! Why, the solution is easy. A good looking boy like you can get himself any number of girls.’

But Jhani shook his head, defiantly. He blurted out, ‘I love this particular girl and want to marry her. Then he asserted in a tone of finality, ‘I like no other woman.’

The dacoit laughed aloud at hearing this. ‘So, because you have lost her, you want to become a dacoit like me?’ he asked.

‘I do,’ asserted Jhani, ‘and to kill the rich.’

‘Well, that is fair enough with me,’ conceded Charna, ‘but let us see what the Maharajah has to say. We will be seeing him tomorrow.’

Jhani was given food and rested that day, and at dusk went with the band of men into whose company he had fallen, on a trek that led them some ten miles eastwards. They entered scrub jungle, and at about 10 p.m. came to a halt where the jungle gave way to ploughed fields. There they hid themselves in silence .

Charna called him a little after midnight and announced the band was going into action. He was told to remain in hiding until they rejoined him at this same place till about two hours time.

Soon after that the men disappeared and Jhani was left alone.

Sometime later he heard the sound of firing. This continued for a short while and then died down, to be followed by a reddish glow on the horizon about a mile away. Undoubtedly a fire, Jhani guessed.

A half hour or so passed, and then the dacoit band came back, walking stealthily and in single file. Jhani noticed that several of the men were carrying two and three rifles apiece. Three or four of them had tommy guns which had not been in their possession when they had set out. A number of the others staggered under the

weight of boxes which they bore between them.

Rightly, he guessed that they had just made a raid on some military outpost or police chowki, and were returning with the booty they had captured. Doubtless the red glow he had seen had been occasioned by flames when the dacoits had set fire to some building or shed.

After they rejoined him the band continued in another direction which appeared to penetrate deeper and deeper into the jungle.

The raiders had evidently chosen their time well, as in a short while a late-rising moon helped them to grope their way among the trees and bushes as the jungle became more dense.

A little over an hour's walking brought them to a glade in the forest. At the border of this glade, Jhani heard a voice challenge them softly, to which Charna answered in his gruff tone. They then moved on, and soon found themselves in an encampment where many people lay, or sat beside dimly-glowing fires. At the further edge of the glade Jhani could make out the dim outline of a half dozen or so conical tents.

The party with which he had just arrived halted in the centre of the glade, and the men who carried two and three firearms apiece stacked them in a neat pile before one of the fires. There was whispered talk and hushed laughter as the newcomers recounted, in undertones, their recent adventure .

A little later Jhani noticed a fresh group of figures approaching them from the direction where the tents were pitched. An old man headed the party, closely followed by another with a tommy gun. Two more younger men brought up the rear.

When the light fell upon the old man, Jhani noticed his abnormally high forehead and the grey beard, whiskers and enormous moustache.

Charna addressed the newcomer, 'Salaam, Maharajah-Sahib. The gods have been good to us this night and we have seized thirteen service rifles, three tommy guns, a revolver and some boxes of ammunition without the loss of a single man. We caught the policemen playing cards by the light of their lanterns instead of keeping a careful watch, and wiped out both the sentries and the main body of men who were asleep, before they knew what was happening. Finally we set fire to the chowki.

'Good work, Charna Sahib; my congratulations,' replied the old man heartily, in a melodious voice. 'You have never failed me.'

Then with a chuckle he dug his lieutenant playfully in the ribs and said, ‘The gods are always particularly good to you, eh? You rascal!’

Charna acknowledged the compliment with the happy smile of a flattered schoolboy.

Man Singh and Charna examined the booty together, and commented for some time after that on the quality of the present-day service rifles and their ammunition. Suddenly Charna looked around and his eye alighted on Jhani.

‘Maharaj, I almost forgot,’ he said apologetically, ‘we found a boy wandering in the ravines who said he is looking for you. He wants to join us in order to kill the rich, because a rich father took away his daughter from this farmer boy who has fallen deeply in love with her.’

And Charna chuckled again at the thought of the foolishness of the thing called ‘true love’.

Man Singh’s piercing steely-eyes appeared to bore into Jhani. ‘Come over here, boy,’ he ordered softly, ‘and tell me your story.’

Jhani stepped forward and poured out his tale in detail, while the old man listened sympathetically. Unlike the gruff Charna, he did not scoff or make fun of him after he had stopped speaking, but remained silent and thoughtful. There was a faraway, reminiscent look in his eyes.

Then he spoke, ‘This old man, your father,’ he asked. ‘Tell me more about him and your farm. What did you say his name was?’

‘Balaji,’ answered Jhani. He went on to relate all about his father and the twelve-acre farm of which he was so proud, to the dacoit leader. Warming to his subject, he also spoke about his mother, Meerabai, and of how she had helped his father right up to the day of her untimely death after having been bitten by the cobra.

Charna turned away, while Jhani was speaking, and started examining some of the captured weapons. Obviously, being a man of action and of blood, he was not interested in such sentimental tales.

But Man Singh listened to him attentively throughout, and only after he had finished did the dacoit-king comment, ‘What a sad and beautiful story.’

Then he patted Jhani on the back.

‘Come with me, lad,’ he said, turning towards the row of tents, ‘I will give you a cup of tea, and at the same time, talk to you.’

Jhani followed him.

Man Singh led him inside the tent he occupied, accompanied by the bodyguard with the tommy gun. A lantern was burning dimly there.

The dacoit-leader clapped his hands and a retainer appeared.

'Bring 'cha' (tea),' he ordered briefly.

Then he sat on the ground and invited Jhani to be seated also. The man with the tommy gun remained standing. Not for a moment did he take his eyes off Jhani.

'Now Jhani,' said the old man with surprising tenderness, 'I am going to talk to you, not as Man Singh, the thief, but as a father and as if you were one of my own sons.

'For I have four of them and a daughter, too, you must know. Hence I understand what the love of a father is .

'You have asked to be allowed to join my band of villains,' and here he smiled good-humouredly, 'because you want to make war upon the rich.

'Jhani, you flatter me by volunteering your services to me. Never have I refused anybody who so offered himself to me, with but one exception.

'And that exception is you, Jhani. Because I am not going to allow you to do it.'

Jhani started in surprise as the old man turned and looked him full in the face. Words failed him in his great disappointment. Had he heard aright?

Man Singh's hand patted him on the knee as he added, 'Don't be upset, Jhani. I understand how you feel about matters. I will tell you why I won't allow you to join us, and I will also try to advise you what would be the best thing to do.'

Their talk was interrupted by the entry of the servant bearing a kettle of tea and two aluminium mugs. As he turned to leave, Man Singh ordered him to bring a third mug for his bodyguard.

The old man filled Jhani's cup, followed by his own.

Just then the servant came back with a third aluminium tumbler. This Man Singh himself filled and handed to his bodyguard, who sipped it, standing.

'Now Jhani, try to understand me,' he continued. 'You are a good boy, untainted by any evil, except that you have fallen in love, and that is not an evil thing. On the contrary, it is very natural.

'If I allow you to join us, you will grow into a thief and a

murderer; a common dacoit like the rest of us here. No doubt you will fulfil your desire for revenge by killing a few rich people, but where will that get you?

'There will be a price upon your head, Jhani. It will be the price of violence and of spilt blood. It lies upon each of our heads, now.

'Eventually you will be killed, or you will be caught and put into prison .

'That would break the old man—your father's heart. Your beloved farmlands will never see you. What's more, you can never hope to meet your sweetheart, Lotibai, again.

'If I agreed to let you join me, Jhani, I would be making a murderer out of an innocent boy like you; while I would be breaking both your father's and your girlfriend's hearts. That I don't want to do, I had an old father once and I know what heartache he suffered when I took to this life of murder and violence. I, too, was a farmer like you. I can still picture my farmlands in my memory and long to be back on them if only for a few minutes. But that is denied to me, because I have made myself a fugitive and an outcast, forever.

'That is why I refused you, boy. Now do you understand?

'But I can advise you what to do, if you care to listen to me.

'Be a man, Jhani. Shoulder your responsibilities. Don't try to run away from them, or drown them in a bloodbath of revenge.

'An old saying tells us, "Revenge is sweet". But don't you ever believe it, Jhani. Revenge is a very very bitter thing, and brings only bitterness and frustration in its wake—forever!

'I know what I am talking about, Jhani. It was with motives of revenge and hatred in my heart that, like you now want to do, I left my father and farm and home and became a dacoit. I don't think God made me to hate and kill my fellow men. I think He wanted me to love them. That is why love still glimmers in my heart today, like it glimmers at this moment for you.

'But in my hot-blooded youth there was nobody to advise or restrain me like I am now advising and restraining you. I gave away to these feelings of hatred and vengeance. Just like you, I wanted to kill my enemies and take revenge upon them.

'And I did just that.

'What has it brought me, Jhani? Yes, I killed them it is true. But did their murder bring me any lasting satisfaction? No; and I repeat, a thousand times NO! It has brought the blood of a hundred men

and more on my hands and the death penalty on my head .

'I have no house, no home, no father, no land, no farm, now, to call my own. I lay my head down to sleep on a stone at night never knowing but it may be my last, or hide in some hole or jungle or burrow. I am like a human jackal, forever on the watch, forever on the run!

'People think I am happy; but I am not, my son.

'It would be very wicked for me to assist you to follow in my footsteps, Jhani. Indeed it would be but another murder to my account. Your murder!

'For that reason I won't have you as one of my band.

'But listen to me a little longer, boy. Be a man! Fight your troubles, don't run before them!

'Go and join the army as soon as you get back. Be a soldier of free India. It is an honourable profession.

'Maybe God will grant your prayers at some future date. You may meet your sweetheart, Lotibai, again. Then you will be holding a respectable station in life. You can marry her without caring about anyone. She will be proud of you. Your father and your lands will be proud of you. I, for one, if I live to hear of it, will be very proud of you.

'That is my advice, Jhani. I, Rajah Man Singh Rathore, have spoken.'

Jhani was silent. Unshed tears glistened in his eyes as he wondered. Could this man, who spoke to him thus, be in reality the dacoit-king who was wanted in four states for murder, robbery and violence? Why, he had uttered words of infinite wisdom, spoken with a tenderness far surpassing the rough speech of his own farmer-father, Balaji.

Jhani's mind was made up. He would follow the old man's advice.

He jumped up, to bend low before the bandit-leader.

'Maharajah-Sahib, you have spoken as no father or mother yet spoke to me, and I cannot but follow your counsel,' he said simply.

'Good boy,' said the old man, getting up himself, 'I shall arrange for two of my men to accompany you this very night, by another route to the outskirts of the nearest village, six miles away.

'I know you will not tell anyone that you met and spoke to me or any of my band here. You are not that kind of boy .

May you be a soldier soon and perhaps a general in a few years.

Who knows? Then perhaps it will be your duty to shoot this old dacoit, Man Singh, for the many evil deeds he has done.'

And he laughed heartily at his own joke.

But Jhani murmured, 'God forbid, your excellency. I could never do that.'

~

Kumar had taken Lotibai, his daughter, a long distance away. He took her to the city of Ahmedabad where lived his two sisters.

They had themselves married two brothers, both the owners of large cotton mills on the outskirts of the city. They had palatial houses and a steady revenue from the profits.

But both of them had no children.

In course of time the two brothers had died, leaving the two sisters very comfortably off. Being without children, ownership of the mills had reverted to their husbands' family (in accordance with Indian custom), while the two sisters continued to reside in Ahmedabad on very substantial monthly incomes from capital in the bank previously invested in their names, and a separate house for each of them.

It was to these two sisters of his that Kumar took Loti. He knew he could fully entrust them to not divulge the secret of the disgrace that had fallen upon him. He also felt they would be able to find a way of getting rid of the wretched farmer-boy's spawn if there was to be any, before it was born. Thirdly, as Lotibai was a stranger to Ahmedabad, he hoped that with her two aunts' backing and considerable influence, some man might be found, among the rich mill owners of the city, who would volunteer to marry her despite the fact that she was no longer a virgin; which would anyway have to be told to him in advance.

In the small town of Bhind where he lived and was so well-known, such a match would be impossible to arrange. On the contrary, the scandal would spread like wildfire and his name would become the laughing stock of the marketplace .

The two aunts, like Loti's father Kumar, their brother, were severe-looking individuals, much resembling him in angular features and compact, well-set build. The elder of the two, Kumari, who incidentally was older than her brother Kumar by two years had always bossed her husband one of the mill owners at home.

This had caused the poor man during his lifetime to develop tyrannical characteristics at his mill where he had been most unpopular with his subordinates and the workers in general.

Fate had ordained that the younger sister, Parvati, who was junior to Kumar by three years should marry the more assertive of the two mill owner brothers, with the result that she had not been the ruling member of her household.

Now with the two brothers dead, Kumari had automatically adopted an almost parental if not distinctly dictatorial control over her younger sister, Parvati.

Soon after Kumar and Lotibai arrived at his elder sister, Kumari's residence, Parvati was called and in a conference between the three of them from which Loti was pointedly excluded, Kumar revealed the dark secret of Loti's condition.

Kumari, who had never been blessed with an offspring of her own, was most indignant.

'What were you about, Kumar?' she queried angrily, 'you should have horsewhipped the young blackguard.' Parvati, who was mildly thrilled by the romance of it all, asked. 'Is he a good-looking boy?'

Kumari pounced on her like a kestrel swooping on its prey. 'I do wish you would not ask such a silly, irrelevant question, Parvati. Is he good-looking; forsooth! The very idea! And suppose he happens to be? What has that got to do with it?'

'Won't that explain why Loti was tempted?' She put the question with matter-of-fact simplicity.

'Oh, do shut up, Parvati. As you grow older you appear to be getting more childish.'

With that rebuke Kumari turned to her brother, 'Let us have Loti in, so that we may talk to her. '

Lotibai was accordingly summoned, and Kumari did not lose any time in unburdening her contempt and feelings upon her unfortunate niece.

'You shameless girl,' she asserted, 'how could you allow a common farmer-boy to do this to you?'

Loti had begun to cry.

Kumar had left in his car the next day, with the strictest of instructions as to what was to be done with Lotibai.

The two sisters kept her under close surveillance; Kumari with critical watchfulness and Parvati with expectation, mixed with a secret sympathy she dared not confide to her austere sister.

Two months passed, and it was evident that Lotibai was pregnant.

Kumari summoned the family doctor, an old man, and asked him in the strictest confidence, as to his opinion.

The doctor examined Lotibai, and declared she was in the family way.

Parvati was rather excited when she heard the news. Oh; if only such a thing could have happened to her!

But Kumari spoke to the doctor in a low tone and for quite a long time at the corner of the verandah before he left.

Then she called Lotibai.

'As you must know yourself by now, girl,' she began, speaking with withering scorn, 'you are going to have a baby. This is the most disgraceful and shameful thing that has happened in our family, particularly when the father of the child is nothing but a farmer. At all costs the child must be destroyed. I have spoken to the good doctor and he has agreed to arrange for this to be done, but only as a very special favour and because he has known our family for so many years.'

This time Loti did not cry. On the contrary, she listened to her aunt with cold and calculated patience.

Then she spoke, and her tone was low and defiant.

'Listen, aunt Kumari,' she said, 'I love the father of the child that is to come and he loves me. He came the very next morning to marry me honourably, but dad prevented it. So it cannot be said he let me down .

'For that reason, I am going to have this baby, whatever dad or you may think, say or do to the contrary.

'And if you attempt to coerce me into causing an abortion, I shall go to the Commissioner of Police this very instant and tell him what you and your family friend, the good doctor, are about.

'You may have forced many people, many times, to do what you wanted them to do, auntie Kumari. But this time you cannot force me to have an abortion. What's more, you know it.'

Loti ceased talking and there was a poignant silence.

'Well said, Loti.'

A quiet voice had uttered the words. The voice of mild Parvati.

Aunt Kumari was furious. She trembled from head to foot with suppressed rage. Like all people accustomed to having their own way, she could not face a reversal, for she knew instinctively that

this time, for once, she was up against it.

The girl had beaten her at the eleventh hour.

Then the floodgates of her wrath burst in full force.

'If you do not do as I say, you shameless slut, you can get out of my house at once. And I mean, today.' The words came in a torrent of fury.

'I will do that now, aunt Kumari,' answered Loti, and turned to leave the room.

'Just a minute, Loti.' It was the quiet voice of Parvati that spoke again. Turning to Kumari, she continued, 'This is our own niece, Kumari. Remember that. She is our own flesh and blood. I for one will not throw her into the streets.'

But Kumari was beside herself with rage. She leapt to her feet and her voice became shrill and vibrant with rage.

'Then get out, the pair of you, and never set foot in my house again.'

Within fifteen minutes Loti had gathered her few possessions; and then, her arm around the waist of frail, sweet Parvati—the little Parvati who had taken a beating all her lifetime till this day—they left the building together.

~

Lotibai had her baby. A bonny boy.

As she gazed upon him, lovingly, she saw in those sparkling eyes the same expression she had seen, and loved so much, in the eyes of his father, Jhani. Nor did the little man appear to have a care in this world, for without any urging, he turned instinctively to clutch her full breast in his tiny hands. He snuggled and sniffed till he found the nipple with his little mouth and applied himself assiduously to his first meal.

Parvati smiled contentedly as she looked down upon him. Even if God had not ordained that she should have her own baby, she was thankful to Him for giving her the courage that day to stand up to her sister, Kumari, who would have so heartlessly destroyed this little infant life in cold blood on the altar of their family pride.

~

Nearly a year passed after that, and little Jhani, as Loti had insisted

upon calling her baby, was growing up to become a very precocious little boy.

Even at that young age he was bursting with mischief, and Loti condoned all his naughtiness because it reminded her of his dear father, the mischievous little schoolboy who had insisted upon pulling her hair.

Aunt Parvati doted on little Jhani, too. The child filled the gap in her life that had always been there until his coming. Indeed, she looked upon him almost as her own son, and was at times jealous that she had to share his infant affection with his mother.

Lotibai had much to thank God for, and her auntie Parvati. Had it not been for the mercy of the Almighty and the courage and kindness of her frail little aunt, she would have been thrown on the streets.

But Lotibai had been thinking seriously within herself, also. She felt it was not right that she should continue to sponge upon this good woman who had stood by her at a time of need, for the rest of her lifetime. Now that her troubles were over, it would be but right that she should think of earning for herself so that she could support the little fellow independently .

The more she thought, the more determined did she become that she should do something about it.

And then Fate ordained the second circumstance that gave her the opportunity.

A Film Company from Bombay came to Ahmedabad to shoot some scenes in a picture about Gujarat, and were staying there for some time.

A girlfriend, whom she had come to know, was related to one of the producers of the company. One day this girl had said to her, ‘Loti, you are so beautiful. Why do you live cooped up in a filthy hole like Ahmedabad? Why don’t you become a filmstar? Any of the film companies will jump at you if you would only apply to them. If I was not the ugly wretch that I am I would have done this myself long ago.

‘Look, my uncle is a Producer of the Bombay Associated Pictures Corporation. He is now in Ahmedabad in connection with this Gujarati picture they are shooting. If you agree, I shall fix up an appointment with him one of these days and introduce you myself.’

The idea was too thrilling for Loti to decide about there and then. Did she have any chance of success? Was there even a hope?

Lotibai promised her friend to think the matter over seriously and to let her know the next day.

That evening Lotibai had her bath as usual. Coming out of the bathroom, she stood before the full-length mirror on the door of her almirah, the Turkish bath towel still wrapped around her wet body.

Was she as beautiful as all that to stand a chance of being taken on in a film company?

Searchingly, Loti studied her own reflection as it gazed back at her out of the mirror.

Boldly, almost shamelessly, she allowed the bath towel to drop to her feet while she appraised the naked girl who now stood before her.

The breasts were as full and as firm as ever. Almost lovingly she lifted them together, one in each hand, noting with satisfaction the mulberry-hued nipples set against their slightly darker-coloured areolae that crowned the mounds of her firm flesh .

She saw with satisfaction the supple shoulders that narrowed, gracefully and symmetrically down her chocolate flanks to her compact waistline, which bulged in turn, sharply and broadly, to the contours of her hips.

She saw the round firmness of her thighs, and pinched them with her fingers to test that firmness. How prettily they bulged also, and then tapered commensurably down to her knees, only to swell again into a beautiful pair of calves that showed-off an exciting pair of legs.

Lotibai raised her eyes to appraise her face. Was there really anything pretty there or had her girlfriend only been flattering her? Perhaps there was; perhaps there wasn't. Anyhow, as she saw her face several times each day in the mirror, she really could not tell.

Nor did she sleep that night. She was thinking about the thrill of becoming a film actress.

Early next morning Loti sought out her friend and asked her to arrange the interview with her uncle.

The Producer sent word to say he would be glad to meet her the following evening at his office at 4 p.m. sharp.

Loti spent a long time in dressing the next afternoon. After some thought she decided to wear her white chiffon sari, bordered in blue and gold. It would not be too loud. At the same time, she knew it suited her well. Aunt Parvati and her friends had told her so.

Loti looked very very pretty as she stepped into the canary-

yellow autorickshaw which would take her to the house of her girlfriend, Surendra. Then the two of them would go on together to the office of her friend's uncle, the Director-Producer.

Sathe, who was one of the producers of the Bombay Associated Pictures Corporation, prided himself upon being what he boldly termed, a self-made man. He had risen from one of the lowest positions in life to his present exalted status and wealth.

His father had been a bank clerk before him and Sathe had followed in father's footsteps. But Sathe loathed banking.

At home in the evenings he wrote novels.

Many of them were rejected by publishers to whom he sent them. But he would not be discouraged. He persevered and wrote and submitted more novels.

And one of them caught on.

It was such a good story that it was snapped by a film company.

Sathe was offered a contract as an assistant to the Director who had been commissioned to shoot the picture based on his novel. He made so good a job of it that the Company retained him on its payroll as a sort of roving assistant.

Then the depression hit the film companies of India. This was in their early years, before they had become properly stabilised or recognised.

Many of them tumbled, and the question of closing down the concern in which Sathe worked came up for careful consideration.

That was the time Sathe stepped in and directed the picture of his lifetime. It was the best picture that had so far ever been made by an Indian film company.

It gave new life to the concern in which he worked. Fresh capital poured in from fresh shareholders and the organisation was formed that came to be known as the Bombay Associated Pictures Corporation. In recognition of his timely services, Sathe was made a Director-Producer in the company.

He was a short man, aged about forty-five years, always dapper, always neat and well-dressed. Filled with dynamic energy, his assistants knew him for a tireless worker. He did not appear to have ever heard of the word 'Cannot'; nor did he seem to know the meaning of failure. He would just go on and on and on, till he finished what he had set himself to do, and completed it successfully.

He had a bullet-shaped head of iron-grey hair that was turning

bald at the top. Hazel-brown eyes, a sharp nose, a neat toothbrush moustache and rather full lips, went with a sharp jaw that ended in a slightly pointed chin.

Mr. Sathe flattered himself that he could tell at a glance whether the man or woman he interviewed was fit for the job for which they had applied and could make the grade, or not .

He looked up and smiled as his niece, Surendra, entered his office on the stroke of four o'clock that evening, followed by a very pretty, shapely girl of medium height in a white sari which contrasted, sharply, against her raven-black locks.

'Uncle, this is Lotibai, the girl I told you about,' introduced Surendra simply.

Sathe stood up and waved the two young ladies towards the half dozen or so chairs that faced him, across his table.

After they were seated, he looked at Loti searchingly. She could feel his gaze travelling up and down, exploring her. It almost seemed as if he was looking through and through her.

Then he spoke and his words had a searching frankness in them. They came straight to the point. 'What prompts you to want to join the films, Miss Lotibai? What makes you think you can act?'

It was a double-barrelled question, and it all but floored her.

Impulsively, she answered.

'I will be quite truthful, Sir, and hide nothing,' she said. 'Necessity to earn my own living makes me want to join. I have a good voice and am fond of music. And I feel I can act if I am given the chance.'

Sathe pouted his lips before he put his next question.

'Have you ever acted before?'

'No Sir,' answered Loti, truthfully, tears of disappointment forming in her eyes as she appreciated the unsatisfactory nature of her own replies, 'but please, please give me just one chance.'

Sathe pouted his lips once again.

What did these girls think film companies were, he wondered. Charitable institutions? Fancy having the audacity to want to join the movies without ever having acted before! It was a piece of cool impertinence, or nerve if you liked to call it that.

But Sathe liked nerve. He admired it. Did he not have nerve himself? Once a bank clerk, what the hell had he known about the films himself before he had joined? Sweet damn all! It was only his nerve and determination that had taught him after that, and built

him up to his present position as a Producer .

Yes, he liked nerve and determination. For he had plenty of both himself.

And apparently this girl had, too.

Besides, she was a very pretty little thing and very prettily built, too. There was no denying that. He had already noticed the charming figure beneath the white chiffon sari.

And she was about to cry. He didn't like that. Were the tears put on, or genuine?

If they were put on—well, she was it bloody fine actress to make an artful old codger like himself wonder if they were real or not.

If they were genuine—well, what the hell!

Did it matter much, anyhow? Somebody had once given him a break in life, and he had taken it.

Why should he not give this pretty young thing a break now?

'Okay, Miss Lotibai,' he said, 'you're hired—as of tomorrow. Report for work here at nine o'clock sharp. We'll see what we can make of you.'

Loti stammered out her thanks. And this time there was no acting. Tears of sheer joy flowed down her cheeks. Unrestrainedly.

After dinner that night, Loti and aunt Parvati tucked little Jhani into bed together. Then they went to the dining room for a last cup of coffee.

'Auntie, there is something I must tell you,' began Lotibai, hesitatingly. 'I have kept it a secret all day, and I hope you won't be angry with me.

'You have been a darling, auntie Parvati. Kinder than a father and mother to me.

'But I just cannot go on living like this on your generosity, and be a burden to you, both in person and as regards the upkeep of myself and little Jhani any longer.

'So today I applied for a job in a Bombay film company—and got it. I start work tomorrow morning.'

Parvati was shocked. At first she felt annoyed with her niece for having kept all this a secret from her .

But she also thought she understood the reason behind it. If she had been in Loti's place, she herself would feel bad about living on somebody else's bounty indefinitely. She would have sought employment, just as Loti had done.

Aunt Parvati was an understanding soul.

Looking up, she smiled at Loti kindly. ‘Congratulations, my dear,’ she said warmly, ‘may you become a famous film actress. But there is one compensation I demand. You must let little Jhani remain with me for some months at least, till you can establish yourself.’

Loti knew she could not refuse this kind-hearted soul who had stood by her for so long, although it would break her heart to leave the little chap behind.

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After Man Singh’s two henchmen had left him on the outskirts of the nearest village, Jhani had worked his way by slow stages to Poona, where there was a Recruiting Centre for the Army.

He filled in the necessary forms and duly stood before the recruiting sergeant.

The sergeant gazed at him in the way all recruiting sergeants the world over, no matter to what army, nation, creed or colour they may belong, gaze at raw recruits from civilian life. There was open disdain in his eye.

‘Now what the hell makes you think you will be a good soldier?’ he asked.

‘Because I want to be one,’ Jhalli had replied.

‘That’s a hell of an answer,’ commented the sergeant. ‘And what were you in civilian life?’

‘A farmer,’ came the frank response.

‘A farmer, by Lord Krishna!’ breathed the sergeant, sourly, ‘what next? Why don’t you join the navy or the air force, and give those buggers the trouble of turning you into a soldier. A hell of a time we are going to have, teaching you your right foot from your left. A farmer! Oh hell! ’

Jhani frowned. What the devil is wrong with this fellow, he wondered. At all railway stations and street corners, I see posters urging young men to join the army. Yet when I come here, this clot makes me feel unwanted. I must ask him.

And Jhani proceeded to put his thoughts into words.

‘Look soldier,’ he said, ‘everywhere there are posters to be seen, inviting young men to join the Army.

‘Yet when I come to do so, you ask me why I want to join the Army. May I ask why you put up such posters?’

The reply caused the sergeant to turn an ashy-grey beneath his dark skin. ‘Wise guy, eh?’ he commented. ‘Okay; go through the door over there. The doctor will put you through the medical examination.’

Jhani was found physically very fit.

Next day he was sworn in and had become a sepoy or ‘jawan’ (private soldier) in the Indian Army.

Two days later he was given a railway warrant and ordered to proceed to Jubbulpore, where he was to join the regiment to which he had been posted for service. It was the 1st Battalion, the President’s Light Infantry.

The next few days were hectic days to the farmer-boy. Accustomed to the routine of working on the land, getting up early to do it, and being his own master throughout the rest of the day, he found army life for the rookie very different; that is, in all ways except the ‘getting up early’ part of it, to which he was well accustomed.

Whereas the crow of the roosters would awaken him at home, here the strident notes of the bugler’s reveille began the routine of the day; a routine far more exacting than any on the old farm.

Here everything was done to order, to time, to discipline. It was a case of hurry—and be quick—all the time, and any time. It started with brushing one’s teeth and washing in the morning; rushing to the latrine; rushing to breakfast; rushing to don full kit and get on parade. These parades were endless and of varying sorts. Marching drill, arms drill, musketry drill. The training was complete. Small arms training, automatic weapons training, tactical training, field training. The inspections very many. Kit inspection, barrack-room inspection, weapons inspection, and even health and physical examinations. Then there were duties to be performed. Barrack duties, camp duties, guard duties.

It was all very very different to the simple life of the agriculturist to which he had been brought up.

Jhani did not like army life at first. But there was one thing to be said in its favour. It did not give him much time in which to recriminate. Fleetingly he would think wistfully of Loti. Where is she at this moment, he would wonder?

Sometimes he thought of his old dad, Balaji, and of the twelve acres of hard ground that were his fields and farmlands.

He had been in the regiment one month when he wrote a letter

home, informing dad he had joined the Army. As he wrote it, Jhani was thankful that the old man had spent the money to have him educated so as to be able to write that letter. He also wondered how his father was going to read it. For he was illiterate.

Then he remembered old Pushtoo. Yes, without doubt he would take the letter across to old Pushtoo, his neighbour. Pushtoo was considered a 'wise guy' in the locality. People would often come to him for help in reading or writing letters for them; and for advice on problems of a personal, family or other nature. The old man made some money out of this practice, also. He would charge half an anna for reading a letter; from one anna up to eight annas for writing it, according to subject-matter, length and the importance of the personage to whom the letter was addressed. Advice cost from two annas to perhaps two rupees. Minor problems were rated low. Advice on how to bargain to get—or to avoid giving—large dowries, might run from one rupee to three rupees. Weightier words of wisdom, on how to dodge the Revenue Tax Collector, the Income Tax Officer, and even the Police, required strenuous and deep thinking on old Pushtoo's part. That kind of advice would cost quite a lot.

Back came the reply to Jhani's letter within a fortnight. He smiled reminiscently to himself as he made out the village scribe's handwriting.

Dad said, 'I am very proud to hear you have joined the Army, son. Since the day you left, and not hearing from you, I have been worried to death over your silence, wondering where you were and what you were doing.

'The wheat crop is coming up fine this year and the well is full of water. The vegetables are not quite up to the mark, however, especially the carrots. Some underground insect seems to have attacked them. Perhaps the manure we put last year was not enough. The ducks are doing well, although I lost four of them lately. A civet cat burrowed its way in under the fence, and bit the heads off four of them, drinking the blood thereafter. All in the same night, too!

'So I borrowed the retired Police Jamadar's muzzleloading gun and sat up for the bugger the following night, hiding in the hay-rick. Along he came by eight o'clock, intending to kill more ducks no doubt. That muzzleloader is a good weapon. It blew him to bits.

'Look after yourself, son, and don't ever forget God. Try to avoid

being sent to the wars if you can. But if you are sent, acquit yourself bravely and gain glory.

'And lastly, son, try to come back to the farm soon, please. These aged bones of mine creak at times, and I feel the work too strenuous. When I am gone there will be nobody to look after it and all the ducks will be killed. It is all for you, Jhani my boy. So, finish your soldiering and come back soon.'

There was a very, very painful lump in Jhani's throat when he finished reading that letter, and the lashes of his eyes were moist with tears. It brought the farm and his old father back to him so closely, and he felt very homesick.

Dad must have paid that versatile Pushtoo at least four annas for writing it, he soliloquised.

A year passed. Jhani was now a Lance Corporal. Liked by officers, sergeants and men, he had fitted in perfectly with Army life .

Six months later he took his first leave and travelled home on a warrant to see dad and the farm. Balaji wept for joy as he embraced his soldier-son, looking so smart in his khaki uniform. Proudly he showed him off to the neighbours and old Pushtoo.

Jhani noticed his father had turned more grey, and there was a slight stoop now in the sturdy, rustic figure. But it was only slight.

The farm appeared moderately prosperous, but as Jhani walked around the well-remembered boundaries later, his eye that had lost none of its skill, could tell that in places it was becoming unkempt and overgrown with the ever-encroaching thorny weeds that infested the area. He knew that the hard work was undoubtedly getting too much and too strenuous for his aging father to do all by himself, nor could he spare the money to hire help.

Jhani returned to his regiment after that and passed another fifteen months at its headquarters, in Jubbulpore. Now three chevrons on his upper arm indicated that he had risen to the rank of a Sergeant.

There was a cinema at Jubbulpore, known as the 'Garrison Theatre', which catered almost exclusively to the military personnel stationed there. During the days of of the British Tommy it had been a popular resort and means of passing away an evening when most of the local bars had been placed 'out of bounds'.

Then the Tommy left India for good, and was replaced by the Jawan. The cinema continued to cater to the military, but English

pictures were rarely shown there now, giving way to the ever-increasing demand for the Hindi product, with films in that language.

Jhani himself was not over-fond of the movies and was only a periodic customer. But when he became a Sergeant, his social contacts expanded, and he went more frequently, in the company of other sergeants.

There was a young fellow in the regiment, also a sergeant, who had become a particular pal of his. This youngster's name was Moogan.

One evening Moogan said, 'Let's go to the "flicks" this evening, Jhani. There is a picture called 'Rath ki Rani' (the 'Queen of the Night') showing. It stars Battliboi and that new actress, Lotibai. I have seen her but once before, and she is quite a peach, I can tell you.'

Jhani's eyes took on a faraway look. 'Lotibai'—his Lotibai—where could she be? If only he could see her in the flesh, just once more.

'Well, what about it?' asked Moogan, 'will you come?'

But Jhani did not hear his voice. He heard only, instead, the swish of the rain and the crash of thunder. The barrack-room in which they were standing faded from sight, to be replaced by an old, ramshackled construction, without windows and with the moisture running down its decaying walls in streaks. It was almost dark in there—and growing darker each moment with the shades of approaching night.

In his arms he held a lovely creature, her hair and clothing soaked by the rain, her beautiful face with eyes closed upturned to his, the lovely lips half-opened as the heavy breathing of her lustful passion came in gasps and low moans of surrender.

'What the hell's the matter with you?' asked Moogan in surprise, 'you're daydreaming!'

Jhani shook his head as he forced himself to return to the present.

'Yes, I was dreaming,' he said, 'and it was a beautiful dream.'

Then he added, simply, 'My first sweetheart's name—and incidentally she was my only sweetheart—was Lotibai.'

Moogan laughed, a little surprised at his friend's serious demeanour.

'Do you mean to say you had only one girl? Hell, I've had half-a-

dozen, and I've forgotten most of their names. However, we'll go to the flicks then. While you look at the actress, Lotibai, you can think of your old girl, eh? By the way, what happened to her?'

But Jhani did not answer that question. They arrived at the cinema a few minutes before six o'clock, when the show was scheduled to start. It was 6.05 p.m., though, before a bell rang somewhere and the lights went out.

The first item was an advertisement for Tata's 501 soap. The cakes of soap did battle with, and conquered the universal enemy, dirt, to the accompaniment of strains of the most martial music .

Then came an Indian newsreel, depicting the industrial expansion of the country, and showing the new Railway Engine Construction Plant, at Chittaranjan.

There followed a 'Mickey Mouse' cartoon, and two 'trailers' of pictures that were going to be shown at this theatre for the next change of programme, and the week after.

The bell rang again to announce to all and sundry that the main picture of the evening was about to commence.

It was heralded by a loud throbbing of tom-toms, accompanying the twang of Indian stringed instruments, followed by a fanfare of trumpets as the name of the main feature was thrown on the screen.

'Rath ki Rani'.

Jhani saw the Film Censor's certificate indicating the film had been passed for public exhibition. Next the words, 'Starring: B. Battliboi—and Lotibai'.

The sweet name struck another chord of memory as the first scene in the picture opened.

It was that of a woman arranging flowers in a vase.

Jhani looked very intently then.

For, the woman's face was—Lotibai's!

He gripped the arm of his chair as he stared at the screen before him. Could it possibly be true?

The girl on the silver screen spoke for the first time. She said, 'Prasad—is that you?'

It was his Lotibai's voice.

Jhani sprang from his seat, so that it's bottom fell back into place with a resounding 'clack'.

He made for the exit while still looking at the screen, with the result that he tripped over the legs of the other people seated in the same row.

‘What the hell!’ said one, angrily.

‘Easy, Sarge, easy,’ advised the regimental wit, a corporal.

Once out in the lobby, Jhani made for the Manager’s office. Unceremoniously he flung open the door and butted in. The Manager—a portly man—was leaning back in his chair with his feet on his table, complacently smoking a cigar.

‘Tell me something, please,’ asked Jhani in a rush, ‘this picture that is now showing—where does it come from?’

‘What do you mean—where does it come from?’ countered the fat Manager, in surprise.

‘I mean—what studios produced it? What is their address?’

Jhani’s impatience was so great that he felt like shaking the bulky man.

‘Oh, I see,’ replied the Manager, taking his feet off his desk, ‘why, the Bombay Associated Pictures Corporation of course. They are at Malabar Hill, Bombay. Why?…’

But the sergeant had already disappeared. It was something awful what too much drink could do to a man, the Manager mused.

Within twenty minutes Sergeant Jhani sprang to attention and saluted smartly as he entered the Orderly Officer’s room.

‘Sir, there is something I want. Urgently. I want one week’s leave, beginning right now, to go to Bombay. It is a very important matter.’

The Orderly Officer looked at the young sergeant before him. He knew Jhani well. The man had a spotless record. But why all this urgency?

‘What’s happened?’ he asked, kindly. ‘Any bad news? I hope not.’

‘I—I can’t tell you, Sir. I—I mean I would rather not—if you don’t mind, Sir,’ said Jhani, swallowing hard. ‘But please, Sir; I need it urgently. Please grant it.’

The Officer looked him straight in the face. The sergeant was actually trembling from head to foot. He was much agitated—there was no doubt about it.

All this was very irregular in the army. Leave had to be applied for through proper channels in advance, and sanction obtained from the O.C.; unless of course it was something extremely unforeseen.

But Captain Ratna was very human beneath his officer’s uniform. He read the note of pleading in the sergeant’s eyes, and he responded .

‘Alright, sergeant. I will sanction it as a very special case. But be back at the end of the week. No extension, eh!’

‘Thank you, thank you, Sir,’ said Jhani fervently. Then he saluted, turned quickly, and made a dive for the doorway.

‘Come back, man,’ called the Captain, ‘what the hell is the matter with you? Here, take this piece of paper and write out an application at least. And do you want a travel warrant?’

‘There is no time for that, Sir,’ said the sergeant.

Jhani borrowed the captain’s pen and wrote the application hastily.

Ratna looked at him, slightly worried.

Once more Jhani saluted and was out of the door within the next second.

I wonder what has upset the man, thought Ratna. He is almost a nervous wreck.

The giant wheels of the ‘X. B. Class’ locomotive that drew the mail train to Bombay that very night did not turn nearly fast enough for the impatient Jhani. The morning of the day after found him at the Victoria Terminus station at Bombay.

Almost running out of the building, he took a taxi to Malabar Hill, and within the hour stood at the entrance to the palatial studios of the Bombay Associated Pictures Corporation. The place had not opened for business yet, the time being just 8.15 a.m.

‘Tairo! (wait),’ he ordered the taxi driver, who was a Sikh.

Then he bounded up the front steps to the main doorway.

It was closed.

The night chowkidar, who was a Gurkha, was just going off duty. Being an ex-soldier himself, he appraised the sergeant’s chevrons on the visitor’s uniform.

Jhani turned to him almost pleadingly and asked in Hindi, ‘The actress—Miss Lotibai—where does she live?’

The mongolian features of the Gurkha creased in an understanding smile. He replied, ‘Somewhere in Santa Cruz; but I don’t know the address. ’

Jhani bounded down the steps again, dashed back to the taxi, and shouted ‘Santa Cruz’ to the driver.

It took a little more than an hour to reach the suburb. Jhani made frantic inquiries at the little post office. There he was given the address.

Ten more minutes, and he was pressing the doorbell of a little

villa.

It seemed like an eternity before he heard the sound of the bolt being drawn on the inside. The door opened at last.

Before him, in the flesh, stood Lotibai—his Lotibai.

'Loti,' he cried, 'it's you; thank God.'

'Jhani, oh Jhani, my darling,' she responded, receiving him fondly into her wide-open arms.'

The Sikh driver of the taxi had never read classics. But as Jhani paid him and he slipped his vehicle into gear, he quoted a very famous text:

'Much ado about nothing.'

When they were through kissing and caressing each other, Loti told Jhani all about his son in Ahmedabad, and of how she had come to join the films.

He in turn told her how he had met Man Singh, and that it was the dacoit-leader's good advice that had kept him from turning into a murderer, to become a soldier instead. Then Jhani related how he had gone to see the picture! 'Rath ki Rani', which lead him to tracing her.

They were very happy all that forenoon.

After lunch Jhani asked, 'But what will we do now, Loti? I have to be back in Jubbulpore within the week, or I will be court-martialled.'

His sweetheart's eyes looked at him adoringly. Then came her tinkling laughter; the laughter he knew so well and had missed so much.

'Silly Jhani. Remember the answer you gave me that rainy evening on the way home from the moosafarkhana? I give you that same answer now. There is only one thing to do. We will get married tomorrow or the day after, at the Registrar's Office, by special licence.'

'But what about your film career?' he asked, dubiously. Loti grimaced. 'It gives way to the career I have always yearned to lead,' she said simply, 'as your wife.'

They were in time that afternoon to submit their application before the Registrar of Marriages, with a special fee, to be married as soon as possible. The wedding was fixed for the morning of the day after the next.

That evening Loti took Jhani with her to call on Mr. Sathe.

Shri Sathe received her graciously. He had never ceased

congratulating himself on the very successful outcome of the gamble he had taken that evening at Ahmedabad by employing her. It was evident he was quite unprepared for the shock that he was to receive.

'Mr. Sathe,' said Loti in her direct manner, 'I have come to thank you for all you have done for me, and at the same time to beg of you to please release me from the remaining term of my contract. I want to get married to Jhani here, and join him in Jubbulpore.'

'Then she sketched their association briefly, ending up with how Jhani had found her.

Mr. Sathe tried to find a way out.

'Do you mean to tell me that you are gong to sacrifice your whole career on the screen, which promises to turn into a very brilliant one, just to marry a…a sergeant?' He could not help being so blunt, even rude in what he said. He wanted Lotibai to realise she was about to destroy the brilliant future that lay ahead of her as an actress.

'You must remember, Mr. Sathe,' Loti reminded him unaffectedly. 'He is the father of my son.'

Shri Sathe thought he understood, but was not too sure.

As he lay in bed that night, with Loti's fragrant hair spread in abundance over the snowy whiteness of her pillowcase, and the creamy chocolate-tint of her completely nude body clasped tightly to his own naked and slightly darker form, Jhani felt for the first time after many years, that it is good to be alive.

Noon on the third day found them man and wife. The ceremony at the Registrar's Office had been a brief one, and there had been only two witnesses .

One of these was Mr. Sathe, still not quite recovered from his disappointment. The other was her maidservant, whom Loti had brought along with her from her villa in Santa Cruz for the purpose.

That very night Loti left from the Bombay Central Station aboard the Gujarat Mail of the Western Railway, for Ahmedabad, from where she would bring young Jhani to Jubbulpore to meet his father for the first time.

And the same night 'big' Jhani—as Loti now fondly called her husband—left Victoria Terminus by the Central Railway to rejoin duty at Jubbulpore and quickly arrange accommodation for his wife and son.

The meeting between ‘big’ Jhani and ‘little’ Jhani was something that Lotibai would remember for her lifetime. It had made her cry openly with sheer joy.

She had told the little fellow when she had brought him from aunt Parvati’s home, that she was taking him or a long journey by ‘chook-chook train’, at the end of which he would meet his daddy.

Little Jhani had often heard his mother mention his daddy as a big man and a sweet man, but had never seen him. He was agog with excitement and anticipation throughout the trip.

Finally the train clacked over the points in the yard, and began to slow down as it drew into Jubbulpore Railway Station. The smooth flagstones lining the platform slid by gently. Then, with a slight jerk of binding brakes it came to a halt.

Loti opened the compartment door eagerly. There, almost opposite her, scanning the windows of the carriages anxiously, stood ‘big’ Jhani—her Jhani.

‘Jhani,’ she hailed.

‘Loti,’ came the joyful answer.

Next minute, regardless of the curious gaze of the coolies and people jostling past, Jhani had leapt into the doorway and had Loti in his arms. Then it was that he felt a shy tugging at the knee of his trousers and a small voice asked, ‘Daddy?’

Suddenly she remembered.

Loti looked down at the diminutive figure beside her and said, ‘Beloved, there is your son.’

‘Big’ Jhani bent and scooped the little man to his breast. He kissed him on his cheeks and forehead as he said, ‘Son—sonny boy—my son!’

The little chap said again, ‘Daddy.’

There were tears of joy in the sergeant’s eyes. They trickled down his rough cheeks and into the sides of his mouth.

Loti was crying openly—there had to be an outlet for her gladness. There just had to; for it was too great. The coolies and the people jostling by, stopped and stared.

They lived happily in the little cottage that Jhani had rented for

themselves for eight months after that.

But Fate, untiring of the drama she had already enacted with these two people—this man and this woman—elected to spin the wheel of fortune and circumstance and weave the web of coincidence, yet once more, just to see what would happen.

The activities and fame of Rajah Man Singh Rathore, king of dacoits, had spread by this time far beyond the fastnesses of his ravine hideout on the farther bank of the Chambal River.

It had reached to the four quarters of India. Man Singh was spoken about in England, the U.S.A., and even Europe.

In India, thousands of policemen had been deputed to try to stop him; catch him; kill him.

They had all failed.

Now the military were called upon to take a hand in the game.

The yearly festival at the Bateshwar Nath temple was due to be held in exactly ten days' time. The police knew that it was a function the dacoit-king had never failed to attend, year after year in various clever disguises. Year after year they had been there in force themselves. They had scanned the pilgrims almost individually; questioned hundreds of them. Man Singh's description had been broadcast circulated, studied and learnt by heart by the thousands of policemen searching for him. Yet they had not caught him.

And there was a reward of fifteen thousand rupees on his head!

This year the police knew that Man Singh would attend the temple on the festival day as usual to have darshan (puja; worship). They determined to try once again to catch him.

Some Big Brass thought it would be a good idea to call in the military to help the police to do this.

No. 1 Company of the 1st Battalion, the President's Light Infantry stationed at Jubbulpore, was chosen for the duty and were entrained with the temple as their destination, a week in advance.

Sergeant Jhani belonged to No. 1 Company.

The day of the festival dawned bright and cloudless. By nine o'clock in the morning the sun beat down mercilessly from a clear sky.

The vicinity and outskirts of the temple were thronged with thousands upon thousands of pilgrims who had come from distant places to attend the festival. They walked about; or sat, ate or slept in the blazing sun. Vendors of sweetmeat, fruit, and cold drinks—

mostly coloured water of red, green and blue hues with sugar added to it—were doing a roaring trade.

A thin pall of fine dust covered everything and everybody, raised from the parched sand of the earth by the moving feet of the restless thousands. Pariah dogs ranged among the throng, singly and in packs, snatching at morsels thrown to them in charity by the people who were hungry themselves. Occasionally two dogs would grab for the same small piece of dried chappatty. Then a dog fight would start. Other curs in the immediate vicinity would join in. A seething pack of half-a-dozen rending, biting dogs would run hither and thither, snapping at any moving thing; man, woman, child or other dog, that came in their way.

Over all and everywhere, myriads of blue bottle flies hummed restlessly, settling with impartial disregard on sweetmeat, fruit, chappatties, people, dogs—and even on the armed policemen and soldiers as they moved about among the crowds.

In addition to the policemen and soldiers mingling with the pilgrims and whose business it was to scan every face closely and talk to every and any suspicious character, there was a far-flung circle of armed police and military pickets that surrounded the whole area in a ring of steel.

Man Singh's description had been dinned into his head, and into the heads of all the men in No. 1 Company. But Jhani remembered it well enough.

Because Man Singh had been his benefactor.

For once in his service, and for the first time since his days as a rookie, Jhani hated soldiering.

He had taken an oath to be faithful to his duty. Yet could he betray his benefactor if he should meet him? The man who had actually given him a fresh lease of life.

As a sergeant, it was Jhani's task to be on the alert all the time. He had to check the pickets and be with those others on his men who were moving among the crowd. He was also expected to keep a sharp lookout himself for anyone remotely resembling the dacoit-leader.

And so it came to pass that, towards midday, the sergeant wended his way towards one of the public latrines that had been put up to meet the exigencies of the occasion.

It was just a 'tattied' affair; meaning by that that the four walls were of temporary erection, being of bamboo matting.

Each of the latrines had two sections; one for men and one for women.

As most of the pilgrims would be illiterate, this differentiation of the sexes was indicated to all and sundry by crude paintings in green and white; that of a man in white shirt and dhoti, with green turban, being tied to the bamboo mat at the entrance to the latrine for men; and that of an ogre-like female in a green sari, at the entrance to latrine for females.

The passage and flooring of both enclosures had been hastily cemented for the occasion to prevent swamping of the earth by water and excreta. Large zinc pans were installed in the closets for the latter.

Jhani entered the men's latrine.

He came out after ten minutes. And then an accident occurred.

Someone had thrown a banana skin on the cement flooring, just outside the entrance.

Jhani was wearing army regulation boots (somewhat disdainfully referred to in India as 'ammunition' boots, or 'kuttaks').

And anyone who has ever worn 'ammunition' boots will know that the heel is shod with a U-shaped, horse shoe-like iron piece surrounding its outer edge, while hobnail studs are hammered into the soles.

He trod directly on the banana skin.

The very next second, Jhani slipped violently, all but falling upon the floor on the broad of his back.

To recover his balance he flung out both arms violently, and skidded obliquely, to crash head-on into an aged crone, almost bent double and tottering on a wooden ' staff, who had just come out of the adjacent latrine for women.

The brass badge on Jhani's right shoulder caught in the thin piece of sari cloth covering the old hag's head and part of her face. As his weight lunged him against her the badge went with it, to wrench off the cloth and leave the old woman bare-headed.

Recovering his balance, Jhani turned around to apologise.

He found himself gazing into the piercing, steel-like eyes, of Man Singh.

The sergeant's jaw dropped in amazement. No; there was absolutely no doubt about it whatever. The eyes held that same merry twinkle of challenge; that subtle expression of apology for fear of being misunderstood; that expression that begged no offence

be taken; that expression that radiated kindness and good will.

There was no beard, moustache, or whiskers; but without shadow of doubt it was bis benefactor, Rajah Man Singh Rathore who stood before him, disguised so perfectly but for that unforeseen accident that had given him away.

Jhani recovered himself quickly.

There were no pangs of conscience whatever to becloud his mind now. His spoken oath gave place to the far greater moral oath that bound him to this man in its firmer, much more sacred, grip. This man who had saved him from becoming a murderer; and had made it possible for him to rejoin Loti and his son, honourably.

'Maharaj Sahib; go in peace. I shall not betray you,' Jhani breathed the words, 'no; not for any reward in money or all the gold on this earth.'

'Thank you, Jhani my son. Did I not know I could trust you?' Man Singh had whispered back. 'Congratulations on becoming a soldier—and a sergeant, too! I am very very proud of you.'

Jhani could not restrain himself from adding a few hurried sentences. 'I have found her, Maharajah Sahib. We are now happily married and have a son. And one thing more, oh benefactor to whom all three of us owe our present happiness, and for which we are humbly grateful to you. My father has written a letter inviting us and in a fortnight's time we are going to the farm to spend two months with him.'

'I am so glad to hear it; God bless you all,' came the reply. 'And tell Balaji your father—see how well I remember his name—that I am so happy to have saved him from the pangs of sorrow that I caused my own father. Give him this as a personal message to him from Rajah Man Singh Rathore, the dacoit.'

The old hag rejoined the pilgrims; and the sergeant his company.

'The great man recognised even humble me. He remembered my name, even dad's name. He said he was very proud of me. He said he was very happy over all that had happened.'

These thoughts sang joyfully in Jhani's mind.

While the authorities were again greatly disappointed on that festival day. For once more they had not caught Rajah Man Singh Rathore.

Chapter Three

The Policemen who Sought a Reward

Bhind is an area of land comprising some thousands of square miles in the state of Madhya Pradesh, the most extensive state in renaissant India. Its largest town, the capital, bears the same name. The district itself is mainly covered with thick jungles, and human habitations are few and far between. It is a land of legend and folklore, fables and ghost stories told by the dancing flicker of firelight; most nearly approaching the India of bygone days. Men's wants are few and simple, because money is hard to get. And due to its absence in too-large quantities, people are free and happy. Moreover, they are guileless and untainted for the most part by the vices of civilisation.

The men of Bhind require but few material possessions to make them contented. In the hot summer nights when people gasp for breath and perspiration trickles in rivulets between the breasts of a sleeper and bedews his forehead where, one drop uniting with another forms sufficient to drip down upon, and sodden his hard, dirty pillow, the canopy of the star-studded sky above may be the only roof over his head, a free gift to all her sons from Mother Nature for a shelter. When the rains come and the frogs croak in millions in the surrounding swollen streams and ponds; and wood-crickets chirp in their thousands; and fire flies scintillate and synchronise their elfin lamps to bejewel the night with a throbbing, pulsating phosphorescence; and snakes crawl out of their flooded holes to swallow the frogs and seek for drier abodes; and mosquitoes buzz and hum and dive and sting in hundreds; a man

requires a little hut built of wattles with grass thatched roof, to afford some protection from the weather and the snakes.

But be the season dry or rainy, a man needs the presence of a woman, wife or concubine, to cook his food, be a companion to him and administer to his creature wants.

Then he will require a few annas a day to buy wheat flour for making his ‘chappatties’ (these are flat, circular cakes, a foot or so in diameter by perhaps one-fourth of an inch thick). It is the only form of bread known to the people of the area and comprises the staple diet and item of food.

Clothing is a simple matter and presents no problem whatsoever. A long cotton shirt, hanging over a cotton dhoti which is tied around the waist and passes between the legs; a length of cloth loosely wound around the head to form a turban; and a pair of rough, leather sandals to keep the sharp thorns from penetrating his feet; are the only articles worn by a peasant throughout the year. A coarse black blanket is an extra item, used in the chilly winter months from November to January.

Cultivation is scarce, the monsoon unreliable, and farming difficult. People are sometimes desperately poor, but everyone devoutly believes in a God that will supply all his daily necessities, and perhaps throw in a few extras as well.

But luxuries in any form are mostly quite unknown. Occasionally, God would appear to have grown angry with His poor people. A monsoon would fail and the subsequent drought kill all the standing crops. Then there would be no grain, no money, and consequently, no food. Or an epidemic of sickness would ravish the land and thousands would die beneath its spell. At such times of misfortune, even the stoutest hearts quailed from fear and people would sometimes wonder why they had ever been born.

To make matters worse would come the landlord or the servants of the local zamindar, demanding rent for the land that had yielded nothing, with threats of eviction if the money was not paid at once.

How could they pay money when they had none to pay? Their crops had failed and they had nothing to sell. A good number of them were already in debt, for they had not paid for the seed they had sown or the manure they had put down, all for no purpose, in their fields. Surely the landowner understood their plight?

But the landlords and the zamindars and their servants would molest and beat them, threaten to evict them; perhaps even throw

them out physically, by force. They would face dire starvation by the roadside, for no man would give them anything, even if they begged.

Yes indeed; often would a poor peasant wonder why he had been born. Famine and pestilence would sometimes stalk the land and make them think like that, and despair. They would lift up their eyes to heaven and weep, and hope that God had heard their supplications.

But say; was there not one last hope of deliverance left to them on this earth? In the name of Rajah Man Singh; lover of the poor, the down-and-out and needy; benefactor and guardian; deliverer and saviour in time of need and distress. Beloved Man Singh, leader of his dacoit band and succourer of the benighted and starving.

Last year the little hamlet of Rampur had been on the verge of famine and starvation, its crops withered and parched and died beneath a merciless sun without a drop of rain to even moisten them. The rent-gatherers had been more than ever petulant and demanding. Life had held out no hope, and the people of Rampur had called on God to take them away swiftly, and spare them from the pangs of slow starvation and torture and death.

Then suddenly into the village one morning had rumbled eight bullock carts, their oxen tugging and straining under a top-load of gunny bags that reached right up to the eliptical grass roof of each vehicle. The bags were filled with wheat and the leader of the cartmen delivered them to the villagers of Rampur together with a simple message, ‘A gift from Man Singh’.

That gift had saved the village from disaster. Before it had been exhausted relief came from the Government in the form of abundant supplies of food. The situation was now well in hand, and the subsequent monsoon had been as plentiful as its predecessor had been scanty. But the inhabitants of Rampur never forgot Man Singh and his timely aid.

There was a reward of Rs. 15,000 offered by the Government for the apprehension of this notorious individual, who was charged with over two hundred murders and dacoities untold. Yet nobody claimed it. Because, nobody gave information against beloved Man Singh, or betrayed him.

The eight cartmen were closely questioned. They stated a man had hired them a week earlier to drive their carts to a railway station 40 miles away and load bags of grain that would be waiting

there in a goods wagon. He had paid them Rs. 160 for the double trip at the rate of Rs. 20 for each cart. He had also whispered the name of Man Singh to them, and had said that, if they did not complete their part of the bargain and deliver the bags of grain to Rampur within the week, none of them would live to see the sunset on the first day of the following week. So they had delivered the bags on the sixth day.

The cartmen also added that when they reached the wayside railway station to which they had been told to go, the stationmaster there had affirmed that a goods wagon had arrived two days earlier, laden with bags of wheat, and had been kept on a siding awaiting their arrival to unload.

The wagon had been booked in the name of some individual calling himself Man Singh. After all, it was quite a common name in that district.

One summer evening the sun dipped itself in a ball of blood-red fire behind the serrated tops of the tall sal trees that stretched to the western horizon. A narrow, dusty roadway ran through the dense forest, hemmed in on both sides by the close array of the trunks of sal trees. One could not see far between them because of the gathering dusk. The still air yet throbbed with the heat of the day that was done.

Two men who had been striding rapidly along the road, came to a halt beneath a large tree bordering the wayside. One was a tall man, having a beard. The other was of normal height and well-built. They both wore khaki tunics and shorts, putties, service boots and khaki turbans. And they both carried .303 service rifles. For they were policemen.

There is hardly any dusk in the tropics, and there would be none in this densely-forested area. In a few minutes heavy darkness would descend upon them, leaving only the twinkling stars in a slate-blue sky above.

A ball of something soft and brown sailed overhead, flitted around for a moment on silent wings, but soon settled soundlessly before them to be lost to sight in the dust of the roadway. It was quiet for a minute, and then emitted a queer sound, resembling a pebble being thrown and bouncing along the surface of a flat rock. It sounded like ‘Chuck—chuck—chuck—chuck—chuckooo’.

The policemen recognised the sound and the bird that was making it. It was a ‘night jar’. Indeed, darkness was upon them and

they were very apprehensive.

And they had every reason to be. For they were in the very heart of the domain of the notorious dacoit and bandit-leader, Man Singh Rathore. In fact, they were but one of many groups of policemen who had been sent out armed, and in pairs, to try to collect information about and, if possible bring in that infamous brigand.

What was worst of all was the thought that large numbers of policemen had been shot, stabbed or had their throats cut by this fearsome character and his followers in the past. Just last week, nine constables and a sergeant had been ambushed while asleep on the riverbank, decapitated, and their bodies thrown into the river. The ten heads had been left behind by the dacoits at their last encampment as a gift to the posse of police that were pursuing them.

The taller of the two policemen unslung his rifle from his shoulder and resting it against the tree trunk, addressed his squat companion. 'Arre bhai! rath hogya' (meaning, 'Oh brother; night has fallen!). Continuing in Hindustani, he said, 'We had better climb into the branches of this tree. There we will be safe from wild animals; and if we hide ourselves well, should the shaitan (devil) Man Singh and his gang of robbers pass this way they will not see us. What say you? '

The shorter of the two policemen looked up to assess the height and comparative safety afforded by the overhanging boughs of the big tree. With the rapidly falling darkness, its leaves and branches clustered blackly against the steely-blue of the sky above, in which he noticed the stars had begun to twinkle one by one. Withal he was not impressed. He commenced to quarrel with his taller companion.

'This is what comes of listening to you, you fool,' he stated bitterly. 'When I advised camping at the last village you assured me that the town of Kampampoli was but three or four miles further, where we could get a good night's rest, food, and perhaps a woman to share between us. Since that time we have walked at least ten miles, and this blessed road seems to have no end. Nothing but jungle, everywhere; not a signpost or hut of any kind. And now you want me to spend the night in a tree, like a monkey. Idiot that you are!'

The tall constable appeared momentarily taken aback by his

companion's vehemence. Then he started to remonstrate.

'Come brother,' he placated, 'why do you quarrel with me? Such hardships are but part and parcel of our lives as policemen. I only suggested it is safer at night in a tree.'

'Not nearly as safe and as comfortable as we could have been at that last village,' retorted the squat man. 'If Man Singh or his band finds us now, our heads will join those of our ten colleagues who lost theirs last week.'

'Don't be afraid,' rejoined the tall man, whose name was Dass. 'Man Singh is nowhere near us. Even he would not hang out all night in the midst of a forest like this.'

His speech irritated Hariram, the shorter of the two still further. He mouthed an oath as foul in Hindustani as its English translation.

'Who is afraid, Dass?' he almost shouted. 'You, or me? Who first suggested climbing into this blasted tree? You, or me? Who spoke about wild animals and Man Singh? You, or me? You can climb the tree yourself. As for me, I am going on. This damned road must lead us to some place, eventually.' So saying, he reslung his rifle across his shoulder and made to proceed .

Dass lost his temper. As with most men of his nature when foiled, his ire vented itself in personal abuse and invective.

'You short, fat pig,' he hissed, 'I have listened enough to your arrogant words. We are both constables, but as the senior in service, I order you to remain here with me till daylight. After all, if anything should happen to you, I will be held responsible, although as a matter of fact even the jackals would not touch your carcass, far less Man Singh.'

'You be damned,' retorted Hariram, who appeared to feel that what he lacked in height he made up for in weight and muscle, 'you are just an ordinary constable like me, and not my senior. I am going on, and I would like to see you try to stop me.'

Their plight had filled both men with apprehension; terror of the jungle, the darkness, wild animals and of Man Singh. The quarrel that had just broken out had been a diversion to keep their minds off their real problem, which was fear of what might happen to them.

They faced each other, breathing hard and with set faces in the manner of angry men. It was quite dark now. The stillness and gloom around them seemed to scream a message of warning, as if from a thousand muted tongues.

Then they heard the sounds. Footsteps padding along the dust of the road before them; drawing nearer to them, ever nearer.

Could this be the dreaded dacoit and his band of followers? But the footfalls denoted there were only two or three men approaching them, and not a large band.

By now it was too late—and too dark—to attempt climbing into the tree in a hurry. As if by mutual consent, the policemen stepped behind its trunk and waited anxiously. Nor had they long to wait. In a few seconds two figures loomed in the murkiness and came to a halt almost opposite them.

'Why do you hide behind the tree, brothers. Come out, we will not harm you.' The words were uttered in a soft tone by a melodious voice that seemed to carry with it a hint of sarcasm and of amusement.

Dass had been angry before. Now he became furious. He strode forth from behind the tree and approached the two figures. Hariram followed a pace or two behind him .

'What the hell do you mean by saying we are hiding and are afraid,' he shouted at the top of his voice. 'We are policemen and are afraid of nothing!'

'I see,' answered the same voice quietly. 'Then why do you stand behind the tree trunk?'

Dass sized up the two men before answering. It was difficult to make out details in the gloom, but as far as he could see, the man who had spoken must be a fairly old fellow. His flowing beard and heavy moustache and whiskers could easily be made out, and even in the darkness they appeared to be completely grey. He was dressed in the usual manner, in a long shirt and dhoti, while an enormous turban enveloped his head. His companion was younger, very straight and tall, and appeared to possess a distinctly military bearing. With all that, Dass felt that he and Hariram could deal with the young fellow if occasion arose. The old man was not worth taking into account should a fight ensue.

'Stop your insolence,' he grated, 'we heard footsteps approaching and hid behind the tree trunk to see if they were caused by the man for whom we are looking. And…'

'And for whom are you looking?' the old man inquired, mildly.

Dass swallowed hard. This old devil was annoying him, and would have to be taught a lesson.

'Never mind,' he snapped, 'and who are you both?'

‘Farmers,’ came the quick answer.

‘Farmers?’ interjected Hariram incredulously; ‘in the middle of the jungle; at night! Funny sort of farmers, indeed. You appear to me to be more like suspicious characters. Farmers, forsooth!’

At hearing these words the old man shook with laughter, while a wide grin spread from ear to ear over the erstwhile stony countenance of his sturdy companion.

‘That is a good joke indeed,’ he cackled, ‘you calling us suspicious characters, while you go hiding behind trees yourselves! Ha, ha, ha.’ He fairly bounced with merriment.

‘Enough of your insane laughter,’ broke in Dass sternly. ‘Have I not just told you that we hid ourselves thinking you might be the man we are looking for?’

‘And who may he be?’ wheezed the bearded old man.

‘That rascally dacoit, Man Singh.’

‘And why do you want him? Has he done you any harm?’ asked long-beard querulously.

‘What a stupid question to ask,’ broke in Hariram. ‘Are you blind that you cannot make out our uniforms: We are policemen, while Man Singh is a dacoit. Every policemen in these four states is looking for him.’

‘Besides,’ added Dass, ‘what is more to the point is the fact that there is a reward of fifteen thousand rupees for his capture, dead or alive, and I want that money very badly. Say, can you give me any information about this rogue?’

‘Do you need this money so much that you would give away this Man Singh for it, provided you came to know where you could find him?’

For the moment Dass was nonplussed for a ready answer. He never imagined that anyone could be as dull as this old fool. Then he blurted out, ‘Look here, old man; I cannot stay here all night answering your silly questions. For the last time let me assure you that I would give away Man Singh and even my own superior officer in exchange for fifteen thousand rupees. I need the money badly. I have a daughter who has matured, and I must find a husband for her. No husband will agree to marry her without dowry money. And I am a poor man who has no money. If I get this reward I will be able to offer a reasonable dowry to whomsoever agrees to marry my daughter and have a good sum left over for myself.’

‘I understand,’ said the old man, apparently satisfied.

He was silent awhile, then added, ‘Folk round about here say this fellow, Man Singh, has helped many people in straightened circumstances with money. I wonder if you should ask him.’

‘Now I know you are really mad,’ Dass replied contemptuously. He took a beedi from the pocket of his tunic, put the end in his mouth, lit the other end with a match and inhaled the smoke into his lungs gratefully.

As a joke he said to the old man, ‘Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me where this character hangs out, in order that I might ask him. In any case, it is all a pack of lies. I don’t believe these stories one hears about that devil’s supposedly good actions. Personally, I think he is a crafty, murderous pig, and that’s about all.’

To add emphasis to his denunciation, Dass spat scathingly on the sandy road.

‘I am Man Singh.’

With a mighty start the two policemen straightened themselves. The hitherto feeble-looking old man looked feeble no longer. He appeared to grow before their very eyes both in height and girth. His companion, who had been a strapping-looking individual seemed to assume the proportions of a giant.

There was a faint gleam in the starlight as the giant whipped the naked blade of a footlong wicked-looking dagger from his waistband, and held it menacingly in his right hand, its point resting against the pit of Dass’s stomach.

Man Singh remained nonchalant. The two policemen were too thunderstruck to be able to speak. They just stood inarticulate. Slowly an expression of abject terror came into their eyes. They sweated and trembled in fright.

‘Give me your name and address, constable, and I will teach you what kind of person Man Singh is.’ The words were spoken quietly and without anger. But there was a peremptoriness in them that brooked no delay.

‘My name is Ganga Dass, police constable No. 451 of the Bhind town police. I live in Block No. 276 at the Police Lines there.’ The words came tumbling out of the policeman’s mouth, almost mechanically.

‘Go home, Dass, and find a husband for your daughter. Three thousand rupees will be paid to you before this week has ended at

your very door in the Police Quarters. It will suffice for a dowry and none of it is to be kept over for yourself, do you hear ?

'Tell your friends that Man Singh is sometimes merciful. Your heads and your bodies might have otherwise suddenly parted company.

'And one thing more. The whole amount is to be spent for your daughter's dowry. None of it is for you. I will inquire later, and if you have broken this injunction you will surely die! Goodnight.'

Turning to his younger companion, Man Singh said, 'Come, son, let us be going. Our suppers will be getting cold.'

The next instant they were no longer in sight. Three or four seconds later and their footsteps had faded from hearing in the powdery dust of the roadway.

The two constables remained petrified. Their service rifles hung across their shoulders, suspended by their slings. In their pouches each man carried 20 rounds of live ammunition. Yet the idea of firing at Man Singh or trying to arrest him had never even occurred to either of them once.

At last the spell was broken. 'Shaitan ka batcha!' (spawn of the devil!) ejaculated Dass, as he took to his heels in the opposite direction.

Hariram followed suit. But in spite of his best efforts, he could not catch up with his running companion. Perhaps that man's legs were longer, because he was taller.

Or was Hariram just a bit too fat?

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There were two days left and the week would be over. Man Singh had not yet fulfilled his promise. The money had still not been paid.

When Dass and Hariram had eventually reached a village after running what had seemed to be endless miles that memorable night, unthinkingly they had both gasped out to various and astounded audiences garbled versions of what had happened.

They had altered the facts considerably, though. According to them, they had been waylaid by a dozen members of the gang, overpowered, tied hand and foot, and then questioned by Man Singh. They stated they had boldly admitted to the bandit that they were searching for him in an attempt to gain, and share, the reward offered. Dass had said he needed his portion of the 'reward money

to offer as a dowry for his daughter's marriage, when Man Singh had undertaken to send him 3000 rupees within the week, to his address at the police quarters.

The tale spread like wildfire and next day reached the ears of the Commissioner of Police.

That Officer knew that Man Singh had hitherto never failed to keep his promises and would therefore assuredly attempt to pay the money within the stipulated time at the given address.

He determined to catch him when that happened.

An armed guard was placed, night and day, at the entrance to the Police Lines, while pickets surrounded it with instructions to shoot to kill any person entering or leaving under suspicious circumstances, or who did not answer a sentry's challenge. Passes were issued to the residents of the police quarters.

The armed cordon was soon complete. For the next week it would be impossible for any unauthorised person to enter or leave the vicinity without being closely scrutinised.

P.C. Dass was in a bad mood.

He had enjoyed the publicity that had come with all these events. But now he had begun to realise he had been a fool to have mentioned anything about it. Maybe Rajah Man Singh had really meant to keep his word and give him that much-coveted amount of Rs. 3000. But now it would be humanly impossible for him even if he had meant to do so.

If only he had kept mum about the whole incident.

Of course he blamed P.C. Hariram for letting the cat out of the bag. Hariram had done most of the talking even if he, Dass himself, had been the first to speak about it upon reaching the village that night.

Then another day passed and there remained but one more. If Man Singh did not pay the money by midnight that night, he would have failed to keep his promise.

Excitement was keyed to fever pitch.

The Commissioner decided to be on hand himself in the event the dacoit-leader should determine to be bold enough to try to carry out his word and come in person.

So he sat in his office long after working hours that evening hoping that something would happen. Hardly a furlong away was the entrance to the Police Lines.

Police Constables Dass and Hariram had been strictly ordered to

remain in their respective quarters all day and not to attempt to stir out until further instructions had been given them.

Dass's 13-year-old daughter, Laxmi, who had recently matured and who had been the cause of all the trouble and excitement, although quite unwittingly, was not as happy and excited as she otherwise might have been. The reason was that her pet dog, which answered to the name of 'Tiger', could not be found since noon. Indeed, he had not come for his midday meal; something he had never missed all his lifetime.

He was only a nondescript, black mongrel, with straggling long hair. But Laxmi was devoted to him and the dog had never left her before. That morning he had followed her as usual to the marketplace and there he had mysteriously disappeared. She was anxious and began to cry.

At 8.30 p.m. the telephone on the Commissioner's desk shrilled loudly. He grabbed the receiver and placed it against his ear. A pleasant voice spoke in Hindustani. 'Police Commissioner Sahib, this is Man Singh speaking. Hasten quickly in your jeep to Quarter No. 276, in order that you may be there to witness the payment of the money I have promised to constable Dass.'

Then the line went dead at the other end.

With a loud oath the Commissioner banged the cradle of the telephone and then yelled to the operator at the Exchange, 'Trace that call, immediately.'

Then he sprang to his feet and made for the doorway of his office, grabbing his leather belt from the peg in the wall from which it was hanging. Fixed to that belt was his holster containing his .38 revolver which he had loaded earlier that very evening .

Outside was the jeep with his orderly-driver lounging at the steering wheel. The glowing end of a beedi dangled from his lips, the acrid taint of its smoke reaching the police officer.

In three strides the Commissioner had arrived at the jeep and was clambering into the vacant seat to the right of the driver, who had just time to throw away his beedi.

'Drive quickly to the Police Lines,' he shouted, 'and stop at the entrance.'

A couple of minutes later they were there.

Seeing the Commissioner suddenly arrive, the sentry had no time in which to 'turn out' the guard. But he hastily sloped arms and then came to the 'present'.

‘Never mind the bloody drill formalities,’ shouted the irate Police Chief, ‘why the hell don’t you challenge me and ask me to show my pass?’

The sentry was taken aback and did not know what he should do next. Stoically returning his rifle to his shoulder at the ‘slope’ position, he demanded almost casually, ‘Halt! who goes there? Show your pass please,’ adding as an afterthought a rather timorous, ‘Sir’.

‘Oh, go to hell, growled the Commissioner, and then to the driver of the jeep, ‘Drive like blazes to quarters No. 276.’

His orderly let in the clutch and the jeep bounded forward.

Hazily, the sentry wondered whether or not he should obey orders now and shoot the Commissioner dead. For he had been definitely instructed to shoot to kill anyone who entered or left the lines without showing his pass on demand. And the Commissioner had just done that.

The Chief himself suddenly remembered his own orders and involuntarily flexed the muscles of his back, momentarily expecting to feel the sentry’s bullet in that region. It was just the sort of thing a dim-witted sentry, like the dolt he had left standing there, would do—shoot his own Commissioner—he mused.

But fortunately nothing happened and the jeep arrived in a cloud of dust at No. 276. The Commissioner bounded through the open front door, shouting, ‘Police Constable Dass; where are you? ’

The constable, who had been reclining on his bed bare-bodied and with only a dhoti, scrambled up hastily and stood at attention. ‘Here Sir,’ he stuttered.

‘Has anything happened? Has the money been paid? Speak up, man, and don’t stand there staring at me like an ‘oolu’ (owl).’

‘Nothing whatever has happened, Sir,’ answered the surprised constable.

The Commissioner was relieved. Thank God it had only been a hoax and not a reality. If the money was to be paid that night right under his very nose and in spite of all his precautions, he would be the laughing stock of the entire Police Force throughout the length and breadth of India. He would probably be compelled, through shame, to volunteer for retirement from active service although he had a couple of years left before that time came.

Just then a nondescript black mongrel entered by the front door behind the Commissioner. The girl, Laxmi, who had been standing

at the other doorway at the rear, and wondering what all the confusion was about, spotted the dog and ran to him with outstretched hands.

‘Tiger; you naughty dog! Where have you been all day?’ she greeted affectionately.

The animal stopped and gazed up at her with loving eyes, his awkward black tail wagging vigorously and causing his hindquarters to wag along with it.

‘And what have you got tied to your collar?’ asked Laxmi, indicating what appeared to be a six-inch long black cylinder neatly fixed to the collar at both its ends.

Regardless of the risk he ran of being bitten, the Commissioner grabbed the dog by its collar and tried to wrench off the black cylinder.

But it had been wired on firmly at both ends.

‘Take the damned collar off’, he shouted at Dass, irritably.

A couple of minutes later the cylinder lay on the table. It was of thin tin, painted black. In his excitement the Commissioner wrenched off the top with his bare hands .

Inside were thirty new one-hundred rupee currency notes, and a short message written in pencil in Hindi, on a piece of cigarette paper. It read, ‘Rajah Man Singh Rathore always keeps his promise’.

Dass looked at the money. Then his eyes closed, and in spite of the near presence of his senior most officer his lips were heard to mutter the words, ‘Ram, ram; Rajah Man Singh Sahib.’

Within hardly two months time his daughter was married. And she procured a respectable husband, too. The dowry of three thousand rupees offered with her made sure of that.

And Police Constable Dass kept none of it for himself; for above everything else he certainly did not want to die.

Chapter Four

The Invasion of the Ravine Kingdom

'The Old Man is creating hell and something has got to be done about it.'

The District Superintendent of Police (D.S.P.) was speaking, and there was an air of finality in his voice.

The 'Old Man' to whom he was referring was by no means really old. And the term had by no means been applied in a disrespectful sense. Rather, there was a hint of apprehension and awe in its use.

For the D.S.P. was referring to his immediate superior, the Deputy Inspector General, who had summoned him just the Tuesday before. That officer's words were as fresh in his memory as if they had only been uttered the moment before.

'It is a damned disgrace, Chandra,' he had thundered, banging the office desk before him with the palms of both his hands simultaneously. 'One single man out there in the blue, leading a handful of nondescript ruffians; and nearly two thousand policemen after him for almost three years! And yet they cannot catch him.

'Come, man, do you realise it?' he asked, warming to his subject. 'The whole of India is laughing at us. Every bloody policeman, in every bloody police force, in every bloody state in this peninsular is asking, 'What the hell are two thousand policemen, from four states, about? They cannot catch one hairy brigand!

'Our name stinks to high heaven. The governments of these four states write me D. Os. practically every ruddy week, asking me for a full report on what progress we have made. Progress, my left foot!

These bastards at headquarters appear to have no other work to do. They just sit on their fannies at their desks and dictate silly letters to some little bit of fluff they call their stenographer.

'But let us face the fact, Chandra my boy. We have absolutely no progress to report to them. Every week I pass the buck and write the same reply, but in different words: "Investigations are proceeding satisfactorily and we expect to be able to raid Man Singh's headquarters very shortly."

'But no raid takes place. Because it can't; for the childish reason that we don't know where the bugger's headquarters are.'

The D.I.G. was working himself up to a fine pitch of rage. His name was Sen Gupta, and he was a Bengali. One of the smartest officers in the Calcutta Police, he had been assigned to the special task of eliminating Man Singh and his dacoit bands, with 1700 policemen and officers under his command to achieve this result.

That result, however, had not materialised.

Sen Gupta was an intelligent man, and he was an officer who expected—and got—ruction from his subordinates. He drove them and lashed them with his tongue, till they did something about it.

His rather large head was covered with short, stiff hair, with no signs of grey in it despite his fifty years of age. It was the sort of hair that always refused to be combed or brushed, and so he left it alone. A close-clipped, black toothbrush moustache sat above his upper lip and added to his stern appearance. Grey-green eyes glittered from almost hairless eyebrows. A longish nose; thin, selfish lips; and a square, slightly protruding chin, combined with the moustache and bristly hair to give him decidedly formidable aspect.

Slightly above average height—he was exactly 5 foot 10½ inches—he was a heavily-built man who touched the scales at 200 pounds.

Above all, he was decidedly short-tempered, and when he became angry he would snort like a bull, breathe in gasps, and hammer his unfortunate desk or whatever article of furniture came within reach with the palms of his hands; and he would go on hammering, harder and harder.

He was doing that just now .

Almost idly, Chandra wondered as to which of the two were suffering more—the D.I.G's hands or the D.I.G's table.

Sen Gupta stopped gasping suddenly, and went on in a dry voice, selecting his words.

‘Do you know, Chandra, when I was at school in Calcutta, my second language was Latin. God knows why they taught it and why I learnt it. I have forgotten the whole ruddy subject except for one phrase which stuck in my head. And for that one phrase I shall be always grateful to the language of the Caesars.

‘The phrase is, “Faeces taurus sapientum sedit”. And it means, “Bullshit baffles brains”.

‘And that is exactly what I have been doing in my reports all these weeks, Chandra my boy. Baffling the brains of these blighters at headquarters; that is, if they have any brains at all, which I doubt —with my bullshitting reports.

‘But the game is played out and cannot go on any longer. Even the dimwits there have woken up to the fact that my weekly letters are just parrot-like repetitions and don’t mean a damned thing.

‘The people in New Delhi consider us the choicest set of nincompoops out of all the policemen in India. I don’t know what the outside world thinks. But, if they have heard of what is going on, I, as the head of these operations, must be considered to be on a level of intelligence comparable with Donald Duck.’

Throughout the tirade, Chandra had not said a word. He had been through several of the sort before, and knew that if he dared to interrupt the Old Man would probably explode altogether, and burst a blood vessel and die.

So he wisely kept silent.

Sen Gupta went on and on in the same strain for a while. Chandra was thinking: What the hell! This fat bastard keeps yapping by the mile. Why doesn’t the bugger get off his bottom and do something himself, instead of crying on my shoulder.

Chandra was a tall, lean man, and very dark. He came from the city of Madras, in southern India. Comparatively young—he was 35 years old—to hold the rank of a District Superintendent, he had put in meritorious service in his earlier years with the Madras Police among the criminal tribes of that State; and had also spent some time pursuing dacoits in the area around Bastar State and the central parts of the Godavari River where outlaws, although of a minor character, had operated for generations on end.

In fact, any police officer or policeman who had had some knowledge or experience in the pursuit of dacoits, or outlaws of any description, major or minor, throughout India, had been drafted into the special force that had been organised, and placed under

Sen Gupta to liquidate Man Singh and his notorious followers.

Eventually the D.I.G. was silent. Having given vent to his emotions, he began to feel somewhat less pent-up. Just then, Chandra was saying, 'All you state is true, Sir. But what do you suggest be done?' It was a tactless question, put too soon after his recent outburst.

Sen Gupta bristled afresh.

'A damned silly question to ask, Chandra,' he said, shortly. 'Damned silly, indeed! That is exactly what I am asking you, man. So what the hell is the good of asking the same question back to me? Why, do something of course. You have a hell of a lot of men under you. Cross the Chambal River and comb out every ravine on the other side systematically. Rather simple when you come to think of it after all, what?'

Chandra grew angry beneath his dark skin, and his face took on a somewhat ashen hue. What the hell, he thought again; as if Man Singh and his gang will be sitting tamely on the other side, just waiting for us to come and catch him.

'I will have a shot at that, Sir,' was all he commented.

The Old Man had not even bothered to look up at his junior officer. He was staring at the new sheet of blotting paper on the pad before him.

Then he took up the pen on his desk, dipped it in ink, and drew a face roughly on the blotter. It was a face with an absurdly-long, twirling moustache and a huge beard .

Although he had drawn it himself, the face seemed to leer up at him, mockingly.

Sen Gupta jabbed the point of the nib at the drawing. The 'Relief' nib struck the paper and the point bent backwards. But the caricature appeared to smirk as much as before.

The D.I.G. flung the pen across his desk and yelled, 'Orderly! Idher haow! (Come here).'

A police constable marched into the office at a terrific rate; jerked himself to such an abrupt halt that his body leaned forward on its own two feet with the impetus of the speed he had been walking at, and saluted vigorously, the fingers of his right hand vibrating in the region of his temple.

'Bring 'cha,' ordered the D.I.G.; and then to Chandra, 'won't you have a cup of tea?' he invited.

'No thank you, Sir,' Chandra answered rather stiffly; and then,

hesitatingly, ‘if that is all, I will get back to my people and see what can be done.’

The D.I.G. nodded, absent-mindedly.

And thus the interview had ended. Chandra had clicked his heels and saluted before turning about and walking out of the D.I.G.’s large and airy office.

Sen Gupta had merely nodded again.

Now it was Saturday, and Chandra was sitting at another desk. This one belonged to the Inspector of Police stationed in the town of Bhind. The Inspector’s office itself was an annex to the Police Station. Overhead the punkah (long fan made of plaited tatty or cuscus roots) swayed to and fro at a regular rhythm, pulled by means of a rope passing through a hole in the front wall and over a pulley. The ‘operator’ squatted on the verandah outside. He was an almost naked cooly.

As a token of deference towards his senior officer, the Inspector had surrendered his own chair to Chandra, who now sat on it at the Inspector’s table. The latter sat on another wooden-bottomed chair opposite the D.S.P. at the other end of the table. Chandra had been telling him of the interview he had had with the D.I.G., and had closed his account with the assertion that really something had got to be done about it.

The Inspector was anxious to appear cooperative and efficient. But he had been in the district longer than Chandra and longer than the D.I.G., and knew the problems involved. He was a Rajput named Gulab Singh, who had served in the Army and been transferred to the Police, subsequently. Some 45 years of age, wizened in look and wearing the usual Rajput whiskers and beard, he was as tough as nails. Many a time previous to the advent of his two present officers, he had accompanied punitive expeditions of police across the Chambal to try to search the ravines. From every one of those sorties they had returned empty-handed, and from not a few with less policemen than had set out. Some of these policemen had been shot by snipers hiding behind boulders or in caves or among the cliffs with which the ravines abounded. At other times the whole, party had been ambushed and many killed before they were even aware of danger. So, the D.S.P.’s anxiety for action and the D.I.G.’s impatient annoyance did not succeed in arousing much enthusiasm in Gulab Singh, the Inspector.

‘Huzoor,’ he told Chandra in Hindi, ‘there is a proverb which

says, “The foolish clamour for deeds and sometimes wise men suffer thereby”. To enter among the ravines with a large number of men by day is quite futile. If the police force is big, the dacoits just vanish. If it is small, we will be fired upon and some of us killed. I have seen it happen over and over again, many times.’

Chandra did not reply. He was thinking deeply. What the Inspector had just said was quite true, and he had to admit it in spite of the D.I.G’s impatience. To take a body of policemen across the Chambal in broad daylight would produce no result whatever. Either they would see nobody all that day, or they would be shot at, unexpectedly.

Nevertheless, something just had to be done.

So the D.S.P. continued to think, and the Inspector continued to regard him stonily, lost in his own meditation.

Suddenly Chandra stiffened involuntarily. An idea had come to him. A good idea. The more he thought about it, the more he liked it. A slight smile played about the corners of his mouth.

‘Inspector Sahib,’ he spoke with deliberation. ‘You have said that it was futile to take a force across the river and into the ravines at daytime as the outlaws would see us coming?’

‘That is so, huzoor,’ replied Gulab Singh, patiently.

‘Then what if we take them across secretly at the dead of night and hide the other side during the day?’ The Inspector’s eyes opened a little wider in astonishment. What silly scheme is this, he wondered. ‘Man Singh’s spies are everywhere, Sir. The river is watched at night. They would see us crossing.’

‘Not necessarily, Inspector, not necessary,’ continued Chandra, indulgently. ‘We would choose a dark night for the undertaking; and a time when nearly all men are asleep, including the sentries of friend and foe alike.’ Here Chandra smiled very confidingly, as if to indicate to his subordinate that he knew all about the vagaries of sentries all the world over.

Gulab Singh did not reply.

‘Please hand me that wall calendar, Gulab Singh,’ continued Chandra after a while, ‘and please fetch the large map of the area that has been issued to all police stations and chowkies and should be hanging on the wall. Where is it?’

‘Here Sahib,’ said the Rajput, rising from his chair and walking across the room to an ancient wooden almirah standing in the corner. He unhooked the front latch and the door of the almirah

swung crazily open. Chandra heard the hinges squeak, even at that distance.

Reaching his hand up, Gulab Singh felt along the topmost shelf and brought down a roll of paper, almost a yard long.

He took it to the desk, removed the pen-rack and ink bottle that stood there, placing them on the window sill, and put the roll of paper before Chandra. It was the map.

Chandra unrolled it.

The edges began to curl up again. The Inspector noticed this. He walked back to the window and returned with the pen-rack and ink bottle, placing the former on top of the left-hand edge, and the ink bottle on the right edge of the map. The two bottom corners he prevented from rolling themselves up by the simple expedient of opening the desk top slightly, pushing the bottom edge of the map inside, and then reclosing the top.

For there was no paperweight in his office.

The Inspector then walked across the room, removed the large calendar hanging by a nail on the wall opposite to his desk, and placed it on the map before the D.S.P.

Chandra studied the calendar in silence, while Gulab Singh sat down again on the wooden chair opposite him and relapsed into thought.

It was the 10th of the month. The new moon would be on the 15th.

'How many policemen have we stationed near the river who could be moved under cover of darkness, quickly?' he asked.

The Inspector considered the question for a few seconds.

'There are twenty-four armed constables, two sergeants, and a Sub-Inspector at Raoti,' he answered, 'and it is four and a half miles from the river.'

'Hmmm,' mused Chandra. And then, 'That's all?'

Before Gulab Singh could answer, he continued, 'Not much; but still, not too few. They will have to do the job. To march more men, either in the daytime or at night, would give the whole show away. People would know something is afoot and that the police were making a move of some kind. Man Singh would be informed.

'And what arms have these twenty-seven men got?' he next inquired.

'As you know, huzoor, all the police squads in this area are specially trained men. They are either of ex-army stock, or come

from the Armed Reserve. And every detachment is accompanied by an automatic weapon unit, with two tommy guns. The rest of the men will have service rifles; and of course the Sub-Inspector will have his revolver.

Chandra could not help smiling at the meticulous reply furnished by his subordinate .

'And can we get boats to cross the river without telling the owners in advance, or asking their permission? That is most important, Inspector Sahib. As you know, this badmash (bad man) has his agents everywhere; I have no doubt even among the boatmen. They would inform him if they had the slightest hint as to our movements.'

Gulab Singh thought again. Then he said, 'There will be two or three small boats always tied up at a place called Kenchen. It is a point half-a-mile upstream. The river takes a bend there and becomes narrower. You will see it if you look at the map, Sir.'

Chandra began to study the map on the desk before him.

Then the Inspector added, 'But they are small boats, huzoor, and might hold ten men at the most—certainly not twenty-seven.'

'How many boats are kept there normally?' asked Chandra.

'Maybe two or three,' said the Inspector. 'I can find out exactly, if your honour wishes.'

'Tch!—don't do that,' Chandra replied, testily. 'Your inquiries would probably excite suspicion. We will have to chance our luck. If there are less than three boats, we will have to come back for the men who are left behind. And there won't be only twenty-seven men, Gulab Singh,' he continued, meaningly, 'there will be twenty-nine. For you and I are going on this little jaunt. I intend to see this thing through, myself.'

There was another silence as Chandra looked alternately at the map and at the calendar.

'Today is Saturday, the 10th,' he mused aloud. 'We have five days to go before the new moon which will be on Thursday, the 15th, according to the calendar. So we must act on the 12th, 13th or 14th, eh. The Old Man wants action soon. In fact, the sooner the better.

'Suppose we fix Monday the 12th?' he queried, looking up at his subordinate as if expecting a reply.

'What is in your mind, Sir?' asked the Inspector, innocently.

A look of annoyance flitted across Chandra's countenance

momentarily. Then he remembered he had been thinking and talking to himself and not to Gulab Singh. So he started to elaborate on his plan aloud.

'Now listen attentively, Inspector. Nobody should be told in advance about this move, do you understand? Not even the Sub-Inspector and the policemen who are to accompany us. Their tongues might wag and the information leak out. If that happens, the expedition is doomed to failure. Worse still, we might be ambushed,' and he looked up meaningly. 'Therefore, only you and I, and no other living soul, knows about this.'

'Now tomorrow, which is Sunday the 11th, you and I will start on a tour of inspection of all out posts in this area. It will be just a regular inspection and nothing else. But we will call it a 'surprise check'. We shall arrange to reach Raoti somewhat late on the afternoon of Monday the 12th. There, we will carry out a rather thorough inspection. We will check the men, their equipment, their camp, their uniforms, and even inquire into the quality of the rations they are being given to eat.

'We will do all this leisurely. I will be exceptionally strict and ask a dozen questions. You do the same. Between us, we will make it too late to push on to the next outpost that evening.

'So I shall call the Sub-Inspector, berate him for the several faults I have managed to unearth, and blame him for being the cause of detaining us. I shall say to him something like this, 'Sub-Inspector, because of all these things that I have found, it has become too late for the Inspector and me to move on tonight. Due to you, and you alone, we must stay here till morning. So, pitch a tent which the Inspector and I will share tonight. And prepare dinner, for we are hungry. And don't forget to wake us up at crack of dawn tomorrow. We must be on our way before sunrise.

'Having said all this to discomfort that unfortunate officer, we will have dinner and retire early.

'But not to sleep, Inspector.

'At exactly midnight, I shall call you. You, in turn, will awaken the S.I. and bring him to our tent. Then, and only then, shall I acquaint him with what is to happen .

'By two o'clock we should have the men ready, with arms and ammunition, and prepare to move.

'The problem of preparing and taking food with us for the next three days is decidedly ticklish, Gulab Singh. I mean the three days

for which I plan the expedition to last. We dare not tell the camp cook overnight to prepare chappatties. His activities would excite suspicion and he may talk. We could chance it that there might be something in the eating-line ready in the kitchen. But it would be quite insufficient for one thing; and knowing these cooks as I do, I doubt there would be any eatables on hand. You must bear in mind that the men will have to hide in the ravines all the next day and move again at night. And continue doing this for the following two days.

'Yes, this question of food is one hell of a problem, Inspector. Does any solution occur to you?'

Gulab Singh racked his brain. After some minutes, he said, 'There appears but one way out, Sir. We shall have to get the police cooks here, at Bhind, to start preparing chappatties right away—hundreds of them. Sufficient for twenty-nine men for three days. These chappatties we will have to take along with us in the back of the jeep when we set out tomorrow. We shall have to keep them hidden in the jeep till the last moment and then distribute them among the men to put into their haversacks before we actually set forth to cross the river.

'The chappatties will become stale, Sahib, and be as hard as tinplates. The men will be mutinous and probably chuck them away rather than eat what will seem like cardboard, after three days.

'You will surely turn into the most unpopular D.S.P. in the whole of India after that.' Gulab Singh could not restrain himself from uttering this last sentence with a mirthless laugh.

'I know, Inspector Sahib,' admitted Chandra, speaking earnestly, 'yours is an excellent suggestion and incidentally the only solution to the problem, for which I am grateful. Unfortunately, we Indians don't like tinned rations.

'But don't worry,' he went on to add, 'I shall give the men a short pep talk before we actually set out, explaining that it was impossible to have done anything else if we wanted to observe complete secrecy. I shall also promise double promotion to each man, and the equal division of the reward of fifteen thousand rupees which is going begging for the apprehension of this Man Singh, among the twenty-eight of you people.'

Gulab Singh acknowledged the implication in his superior officer's last statement with a slight nod of his wizened head and a flitting smile.

‘How many chappatties are the cooks to prepare, Sahib?’ he asked, instead.

‘I intend to eat the same as the rest of you’, replied Chandra. ‘Let us do some mental arithmetic, then. Twenty-nine men, for three days, at, say ten chappatties a day for all meals. What does that work out to?’

He did some silent calculation.

‘Eight hundred and seventy chappatties; my God! Do you think the cooks could prepare that much here in the short time left to them? They will have to work like hell; and all night.’

‘Surely, Sahib; and the sooner we start them off, the better. Are there any more instructions your honour wishes to give before I go along and set the cooks to work?’

‘Let me think a minute,’ said Chandra, slowly. ‘The general idea is to cross the Chambal that night; hide ourselves in the ravines next day while keeping a sharp lookout for any of the dacoits on the move; creep forward again the following night and hide once more the next day; and repeat the same thing on the third day.

‘By then, if our luck is any good, we may stumble upon something or someone. Even if we do not succeed in finding their headquarters, should we capture one of them we might be able to bribe him—or, if necessary, force him to lead us to where this Man Singh himself hides out.

‘But we won’t be able to stay for more than three days I suppose, with those chappatties becoming drier each day, Oh,’ and he looked up, remembering something, ‘don’t forget to make the men fill their water bottles before we start. They will certainly be needed. In fact, we may run short of water. ’

Chandra stopped talking and mopped the perspiration that was streaming down his face with his handkerchief.

‘Damned hellhole!’ he muttered darkly, ‘if it is like this now, what must we have to endure when summer comes? I wish to God I had never been sent to this bloody place.’

It was, indeed, oppressively hot.

Gulab Singh himself had suddenly found the room very sultry. Then he noticed that the punkah above their heads had stopped moving.

‘The punkah has stopped, huzoor,’ he explained, ‘the wretched cooly must have fallen asleep.’

Both men walked out on to the verandah. The punkah-cooly,

dressed only in a loincloth about his waist, was curled up on the bare stone floor, sound asleep.

'Wake up, you swine!' said Chandra, prodding the recumbent figure with the toe of his boot. 'Is this the way in which you do your job?'

The man sat up and blinked his eyes against the glare of the sun outside.

'Balah,' admonished Gulab Singh, 'I have warned you many times before not to sleep at your post. I shall fine you eight annas for this.'

The cooly seized the end of the punkah rope in both his hands and started pulling it for all he was worth. There was an expression of injured innocence on his face. The pulley creaked with the movement, and the punkah swayed jerkily.

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The chappatties took till noon next day to complete. Gulab Singh wrapped them in pages of newspaper, which in turn were packed into tarpaulin groundsheets and then tied up.

It took three such small tarpaulin sheets to hold the lot, and filled the rear seat of the jeep to capacity.

The D.S.P. and he then set out on their inspection tour. It was nearly two o'clock by the time they left .

They inspected two outposts that evening, camped the night in a Travellers' Bungalow, and continued their inspection the following morning, which was Monday, the 12th.

Three more units were checked. Then followed Monday's midday meal. It was 3.30 p.m. exactly when the jeep came to a halt at Raoti.

The Sub-Inspector in charge of the police unit turned out of his tent, half-dressed, to greet his superior officers. The visit had been entirely a surprise.

'Good afternoon, Sub-Inspector,' greeted Chandra in his most official manner, 'I have come on a surprise check. Get yourself dressed, and the men. I shall give you ten minutes.'

'But I received no intimation that your honour was coming,' complained the S.I., indignation and apprehension vying each other, plainly, in the expression on his face.

'Exactly,' answered Chandra curtly, 'that is what I meant when I

said “surprise check” just now. So, hurry up.’

Gulab Singh turned aside to hide the smile that he could hardly suppress. The Sub-Inspector’s obvious discomfiture at their sudden visit, was almost pathetic.

Ten minutes later the men had fallen in in three ranks with their rifles. The Sub-Inspector stood before them.

‘Squad, “shun!” he ordered.

The policemen sprang to attention.

Then, ‘Slope arms!’; and finally;

‘Present arms!’

The D.S.P. returned the salute and made the appropriate approach by walking up to the paraded men; Inspector Gulab Singh following in his rear.

The Sub-Inspector saluted, and Chandra returned the salute.

‘All right, Sub-Inspector’, he ordered, ‘I will now inspect the men.’

‘Squad, slope arms!’

The men sloped arms, and Chandra began walking down the front rank. Behind him followed Gulab Singh; and behind him again, the Sub-Inspector .

Under such conditions, it was not difficult for a martinet to find fault. And Chandra proved himself to be a real martinet, that day.

‘When did you last polish your buttons?’ he asked one constable.

‘Whose uniform are you wearing? It is much too big for you.’

‘Boots are meant to be polished. Do you ever do that?’

The rear ranks fared even worse.

When the parade had finally been dismissed, Chandra held an armoury inspection, a kit inspection, a tent inspection, and finally a ration check.

It was after five o’clock when he had at last got through. The unfortunate Sub-Inspector had been wishing for the past hour or so that the earth would open suddenly and swallow him up; or, better still, that this bastard of a D.S.P, would drop dead.

But neither eventuality happened.

‘A very poor show; very poor, indeed,’ said Chandra, pursing his lips and looking witheringly at the exhausted S.I. ‘That is why I always conduct surprise checks. They show up faults that would never otherwise come to light.’

The tired S.I. did not comment.

Chandra then looked at his watch and allowed his countenance

to register alarm. He shook his wrist and then held the watch to his ear.

'Great Heavens,' he exclaimed, aghast, 'my watch shows a quarter-past five o'clock! Is that right, Inspector?'

Gulab Singh made a show of consulting his wristwatch in turn. Then he said plainly, 'That time is correct, huzoor. The inspection has, indeed, taken very long.'

'I should bloody well think it would,' retorted Chandra, quickly, 'with everything wrong or improper in some form or the other.'

Then he turned to the S.I., and glared at him.

'Sub-Inspector Tulak Ram', he spoke, acidly, 'it has become too late for me to move on tonight, because of all this delay; and you are responsible for it, entirely.

'Have a tent pitched. The Inspector and I will share it. And prepare khana (food) for both of us. We will rest here and move on tomorrow at dawn. Call me without fail at five o'clock. '

If the S.I. had looked disconsolate before, his face was now a study in dismay.

My God, he was thinking, is this accursed man going to stay here all tonight?

'Well?' Chandra's question broke in, icily, upon his thoughts.

Tulak Ram struggled manfully to recover his composure.

At last he said, 'There is no spare tent,' adding hastily, 'but you will flatter me, Sir, if you and the Inspector would be pleased to occupy mine. I will sleep with the sargeants tonight. And khana shall certainly be prepared.'

It took hardly ten minutes for the S.I. to remove his belongings from his tent. Gulab Singh drove the jeep up and parked it near the entrance so that nobody would nose around and wonder what the tarpaulins at the rear might contain. Then he entered the tent, after Chandra.

'Poor devil,' the latter was saying in an undertone, 'he must be hating me, like hell.'

'I have no doubt he is wishing your honour was dead,' commented Gulab Singh in a matter-of-fact voice.

And they both laughed.

Dinner was served in the tent punctually at eight o'clock.

Half-an-hour later, Tulak Ram dutifully presented himself at the entrance.

'A hot bath has been prepared and is ready for both of you, Sirs,'

he announced, ‘may I instruct my orderly to bring it to the bathroom at the rear?’

‘Thank you,’ said Chandra gracefully, ‘that was thoughtful and kind of you, Tulak Ram, but I hope the water in these parts is clear.’

The S.I. did not acknowledge the thanks with even a smile; while the look he gave the D.S.P. was distinctly hostile.

They both bathed, in succession.

Soon after nine o’clock, the S.I. came again and inquired if there was anything more they wanted. Chandra said, ‘No, thanks. ’

At 10 p.m. the police bugler sounded the ‘Last Post’ and the camp fell into darkness.

There was only a single camp cot—the Sub-Inspector’s—in the tent, on which Chandra lay down. A rope charpoy borrowed from one of the sergeants, had been provided for the Inspector.

‘Take a nap, Gulab Singh,’ Chandra whispered across to his companion on the other charpoy. ‘I am not feeling sleepy. I shall call you at midnight.’

The Inspector was tired and fell asleep almost at once. It seemed to him hardly five minutes later when he felt a hand shaking him by the shoulder.

He opened his eyes. It was pitch-dark. Then he remembered where he was. Standing over him he could feel somebody shaking him; gently but persistently.

It was Chandra, and he was saying, ‘Gulab Singh, wake up; it is ten minutes to twelve o’clock.’

The Inspector sat up on the charpoy, yawned, and stretched both arms above his head.

‘Now go to the other tent and fetch the S.I. And as you are about it, you might as well call the two sergeants who are sleeping with him. I will outline the plan to the three of them when they get here.’

Gulab Singh got up from the charpoy. He slipped his feet into his boots for fear of treading on a cobra or saw-scaled viper in the darkness, but did not lace them. Then he left the tent.

He walked across the few yards that separated them from the neighbouring tent occupied by the sergeants where he knew Tulak Ram was sleeping, entered, took out his matchbox from the breast pocket of his khaki tunic, and struck a match.

He could make out a figure sleeping on a charpoy. Two others lay on the floor.

The man on the charpoy appeared to be having a nightmare. He was muttering incoherently in a high-pitched key. Gulab Singh thought he recognised the S.I.'s voice .

Probably he was dreaming of some demon, with the face of the D.S.P. hotly pursuing him. Gulab Singh smiled to himself at the thought.

The match he held between his fingers commenced to burn him. He threw it down, struck another, and approached the dreamer.

The flickering light revealed that he had been correct. It was indeed Tulak Ram. And he was undoubtedly having a nightmare.

And then the second match went out.

Gulab Singh reached downwards and shook the S.I. gently. It took some minutes to wake him up.

Then the Inspector struck a third match and whispered to the astonished Tulak Ram that the D.S.P. wanted him and the two sergeants to come to his tent immediately.

The S.I. could contain his indignation no longer. He muttered aloud, 'What! In the middle of the night! Can't the bugger even sleep? This is unendurable. I shall tell this bugger tomorrow morning that he can stick this job where the monkey stuck the plum. I'm resigning; first thing in the morning.'

Gulab Singh chuckled aloud.

'Okay; okay,' he spoke soothingly; 'but see what he wants, first. Maybe you will change your mind after that.'

'No bloody fears,' retorted the S.I., now thoroughly exasperated, 'this D.S.P. is the kind of feller I would like to meet on a dark night on a lonely road. He won't be fit after that, in a hurry, for any more of his blasted surprise checks. Damn his bloody eyes!'

But he got up, and woke both the sergeants, one after the other.

The four of them trooped across to the D.S.P.'s tent in a bunch. The lantern had been lighted and was burning dimly.

They found Chandra seated on the edge of the camp cot awaiting them. Tulak Ram made a mental note of the fact that the wooden rod of his camp cot, upon which the D.S.P. was sitting, was actually bending under his weight and in momentary danger of breaking in two. Would this pig pay for it if it snapped? Assuredly not. Beneath his breath he cursed the officer afresh .

He also saluted, half-heartedly.

'Be seated, boys,' Chandra spoke affably, 'you may smoke if you wish while I let you into a little secret.'

Look at this blighter, Tulak Ram was thinking to himself. He sends the Inspector in the middle of the night to wake and call me, and then has the nerve to tell us to smoke if we want. Who the hell thought of bringing cigarettes, anyhow?

As if he was able to divine the hostile thoughts that flowed from his subordinate, Chandra stuck his hand into the pocket of his bush-coat and fished out a packet of Gold Flake cigarettes, followed by a round, nickel-plated army lighter, and offered them to his subordinates in turn.

They each took a cigarette. Chandra helped himself also. Then the lighter was passed from hand to hand, and within a minute the narrow confines of the tent was filled with the haze of tobacco smoke.

The secret is just this. My visit of inspection last afternoon was no inspection at all. It was only done to provide an excuse for my coming here late in the afternoon, and for remaining overnight with you.

'Particularly to you. Sub Inspector Tulak Ram, do I owe an apology for my churlish behaviour all afternoon. But I had to make it appear that everything was wrong in the camp in order to delay my inspection to the point that it grew too late to depart and I would be forced to spend the night here. Actually, Tulak Ram, you have a fine show here and have organised matters very creditably. I shall make a report to this effect just as soon as I get back to headquarters.

'The D.I.G. is raising hell about this Man Singh feller because he is still at large and we cannot catch him.

'So, as soon as I am through outlining details of the plan to you now, we will silently awaken the men, issue arms and ammunition, and start off on an expedition which is to last for three days.

'We will go down to the Chambal River and cross it in boats which, the Inspector tells me, will be moored at the point where the river takes a bend—Kenchen, is it not, Gulab Singh? '

The Inspector nodded his head in the dim light and Chandra went on.

'We will cross very silently and penetrate as far as possible into the ravines. But at the first indication of dawn we shall hide ourselves in some ravine or cave. Before that, we will post a couple of men to watch carefully during the hours of daylight that follow.

'Without being seen themselves, they should keep a careful

lookout for bands of dacoits moving in any direction or towards any particular place.

'Our whole purpose is to try to discover the lair where this Man Singh character hides out, make a lightning raid on it, and capture or kill him.

'If nothing happens that first day, we will advance again a little farther in among the ravines the second night and hide once more when daylight comes. And so also for the third night and day.

'If we have seen no one, or captured nobody during those three days, we will return on the fourth night. Secrecy won't much matter then. When we reach the river we will have to swim two or three of our men across to return with the boats.

'That is the scheme, in general.

'There are some details which we must now go into.

'The first is this. After we have all crossed tonight, two or three men must go back with the boats. It will not do for the owners, next morning to find that their boats have mysteriously crossed the river during the night. They will raise an alarm which might get to Man Singh's ears, and he will be astute enough to know a police party had effected a crossing.

'This is a point we completely overlooked hitherto, Inspector,' added Chandra, addressing Gulab Singh. 'Since you said a boat would not hold more than ten men, we shall need three boats, and that will require three men to bring them back to the mooring place. And we cannot afford to delay on the further bank waiting for the three men to swim back to us. So our party won't be twenty-nine strong as we thought originally, but will only have twenty-six men .

Turning to the Sub-Inspector, he continued. 'It was not advisable, for reasons of security, to inform you in advance, Tulak Ram. The same holds good as regards the preparation and taking of food with us. So the Inspector and I have brought 870 chappaties, prepared by the police cooks at Bhind, along with us which you will find stored at the back of the jeep. This is the ration for the full three days and was to be divided among the twenty-nine of us. Now that there will be only twenty-six, we will have a couple more of them to go round.

'I know that they will be very stale and very dry, by the third day. But that cannot be helped.

'However; I can assure you of this, Sub-Inspector. If we succeed

in capturing or killing Man Singh within the next three days, every man jack of us will receive a double promotion. Also, I will see to it that the reward of Rs. 15,000 that stands for the arrest of Man Singh or the surrender of his dead body, is evenly distributed among the twenty-eight of you.

'Now, Tulak Ram. You must first pick out the three men who are to bring back the boats tonight. And also ensure that there are three good swimmers amongst the other twenty-three, for those three men will have to swim across to fetch the boats to us for our return journey.

'Distribute arms, and at least 100 rounds of ammunition each, to the men who are to cross, including the tommy gun unit who must have ample reserves. Inspector Gulab Singh will give you the chappaties, which should be issued thirty-three to a man. And everybody should carry a full water bottle. That is very, very important.

'No noise is to be made in waking the men—no talking—no explanations—no lights—and the least possible delay.

'It is now past 12.30 a.m.,' Chandra said, consulting the dial of his wristwatch. The men must fall in and be ready to march, fully equipped, by two o'clock. The three men who bring back the boats will come back to the camp and assist the permanent chowkidar to look after the things that are here till the expedition returns .

'I will address the men briefly for a few minutes and explain what is afoot before we start off,' Chandra added, 'by 2.05 a.m., on the dot, we must move, Sub-Inspector. So go to it at once; and you, Gulab Singh, please help him.'

It was past 2.10 a.m., however, before the D.S.P., had finished addressing the assembled constables in an undertone and explaining the whole plan to them.

They moved off after that in single file, to minimise making a noise, each man walking close behind the one in front of him.

The Sub-Inspector led, as he knew the way. Then followed the D.S.P., the Inspector, and the two tommy gunners with one of the sergeants. After that the twenty-two constables were strung out, including the three men who were to return with the empty boats. The remaining sergeants brought up the rear.

They moved diagonally cross-country in the direction of their embarking point at Kenchen, rather than make directly for the river.

After about an hour's walking, they came to a footpath that, Tulak Ram whispered, led from the village of Raoti, some five miles away, to the very point of crossing, at Kenchen, for which they were making. Progress was a bit easier after that, and more silent.

Not twenty minutes later the S.I. halted them, and then crept forward himself silently to the landing stage, to ascertain how many boats were actually moored there, and if anyone was watching them.

Ten minutes after that he was back with the good news that five small boats, in all, were moored to the bank, and that not a soul was with them. A glowing tribute, indeed, to the absolute trust and regard that existed between the owners and Man Singh and his followers.

Chandra congratulated himself on the extreme precautions he had taken to keep the whole expedition a secret—down to the ridiculous point of preparing 870 chappaties in advance and having to cart them along with him from Bhind.

What chance would there have been otherwise, when such feelings of good-fellowship existed between the local folk and this crafty gangster? They would assuredly have conveyed to him every single move made by the police party if they had come to know of it. Small wonder previous expeditions had failed, or ended in disaster! No doubt the officers who had planned them had not attended to such small details personally and as closely as he had. Not taken such infinite pains to keep their movements a secret till literally the very last moment.

The Old Man would be very pleased with him, Chandra thought. And Chandra was very pleased with himself.

The party approached the moored boats.

All five of the craft were identical in construction and capacity. Just ordinary river boats crudely made from cut planks put together almost anyhow. And they certainly would not hold more than ten men in each.

Three of the boats were untied and pushed into the water, and the three men who were to pole them back were assigned accordingly, one to each boat.

Then the three police officers, one sergeant, the two tommy gunners and three constables got into the craft which was to cross first; nine constables got into the second boat; and the remaining sergeant and seven men into the third boat.

In that order they commenced crossing the river, each boat being poled along silently by means of the long bamboo with which it was equipped. Less than ten yards separated the craft from each other.

It was very very dark, and the water looked black and forbidding.

They were within perhaps twenty yards of the opposite bank when it happened, swiftly and all of a sudden without any warning whatever.

As if from they very depths of the river itself, a giant octopus seemed to reach up and seize each craft on its port side, with many tentacles.

And that was the side from which the current was flowing.

At least, that is what it appeared was happening, as Chandra watched for a split second while the boat he was in heeled over dangerously to the left.

As the gunwale of the boat on that side was forced still closer to the river's surface, the mystery of the apparent octopus was explained .

The tentacles that had come out of the water and had looked so black were human arms. As the boat canted still closer to the water human heads came into view, bobbing out of the river in a line—about twenty of them to each boat, at least.

There were men in the water. And they were all pulling upon the sides of each of the boats—and on the same side, to port. The boats would capsize in a second or two.

One word rang in the D.S.P.'s brain—it was 'Dacoits'!

Hastily, Chandra grabbed his revolver from its holster and fired at point-blank range at one of those heads. The head disappeared beneath the surface of the river.

And simultaneously the boat he was in turned over and they were thrown into the water.

Of what exactly happened after that, Chandra had little clear recollection.

He heard yells of pain and curses of rage all around him. The water churned and frothed with intense activity. He caught glimpses of steel as knives flashed aloft and screams of agony followed when they descended. There came the dull thud of blows being administered and the sickening crack of human skulls.

Something heavy descended on his head with terrific force, and

he remembered no more.

It was broad daylight when Chandra regained consciousness. There was an acute pain at the back of his skull. He tried to raise his hands to discover what was wrong, but found he could not, for both hands were tied behind him.

He was alone and there was no sign of any of his companions.

Chandra looked about him. He was lying under a glade of trees beneath which tents had been pitched. Men were sitting in groups beside them, talking. Around him, in a circle, appeared a continuous ridge of rocky cliffs and boulder-strewn hillocks.

Then a voice rang out.

'Look brothers; the policeman is awake. '

A group of men surrounded him, and he at once knew them for what they were.

Dacoits of Man Singh's band.

As he gazed at them, their circle at one end broke and two men strode forward.

The first was an outstanding figure. He was an old man with a high forehead. He had a flowing beard, whiskers and huge moustache.

Often enough had Chandra read that description of its owner upon whom he was now gazing—and over and over again had he studied and memorized it. He knew he was face to face with the redoubtable Rajah Man Singh, himself.

The other man who walked behind the leader was carrying an army-model tommy gun in the crook of his right arm. There was nothing outstanding about this second man, beyond the fact that he scowled fiercely down at the police officer.

'Salaam, D.S.P. Sahib,' greeted Man Singh in his musical voice. 'You wanted so much to see me, and here I am.

'Incidentally, Sahib, you are the second policeman to ever reach my secret hiding place. I congratulate you both; you are brave men.

'The first died; shot, whether you care to believe me or not, by a policeman himself and not by one of my men. Of course it was an accident. But I came to like that man. His name was Katar Singh, an Inspector in the C.I.D.

'Now, you too must die, Sahib; and in your case you will have to be shot by one of my followers. For it is forbidden for a policeman to look upon my secret headquarters, and live.

'But, because you are an officer and a brave man who did his

duty well, you shall not be tortured, Sahib. You will be killed outright. After all, each one of us must die at some time or the other, and my own turn will follow when it has been appointed to take place. You merely go before me, Sahib; that is all.

'Before you go, I will let you into a secret. Your plans were perfect, and no doubt you must be wondering how we came to learn of them in advance and were able to ambush you. '

Then Man Singh turned, and called aloud twice, 'Balah! Balah!'

A little individual broke through the group of encircling men and advanced timidly. He wore a dirty cotton waist cloth and was bare-bodied.

Gazing down upon the D.S.P., he salaamed respectfully.

It was Balah, the punkah cooly, who had stopped pulling the punkah because they thought he had fallen asleep.

As if to clarify any doubt, the almost naked small man said, 'That's why I couldn't pull the punkah, Sahib; because I was at the door, listening.'

Chandra mused—so, his spies are stationed at police Inspector's offices—perhaps there is one even near the D.I.G.!

But further cogitation was interrupted by a short burst of fire from the tommy gun in the hands of the bodyguard who had accompanied Man Singh.

And Chandra never knew the answer to his thoughts.

Chapter Five

The Rich Landlord and the Poor Maiden

Lalita was her name; and it is a beautiful name, no matter in what language it may be spoken. Lalita was a Hindu girl, and she was as pretty as her name.

She was only sixteen years old. But girls mature early in India due to the climate, often at the age of 11 years. (Their parents seek a mate for them then, entering into protracted negotiations with the father and mother of the prospective bridegroom. The boy and girl concerned have themselves nothing whatever to do with it. Their consent is not asked, or taken. They have only to obey their respective parents' behests in the matter of matrimony, and the choice of a mate for them.

The boy who rebels against this custom is ignominiously turned out of the home and becomes an outcaste from his family forever. The girl who offers objection is in still worse plight. Frequently, she is beaten into submission.)

Despite the apparent disadvantage of this system, it also brings its own benefits. Flirtations and promiscuous love between boy and girl is rarely known. The type of woman available to any man for sex before his marriage, and even thereafter, if it should to that, other than his legal wife, is the professional prostitute. And this last type of women are very few in compared to the population of women as a whole and the total population of the land.

Secondly, it ensures that a husband has a virgin for a wife on his wedding night. This is something that is often uncertain in other lands. The Indian wife who, on her honeymoon night, is found to be

unchaste, is invariably turned out by her husband the following morning.

Thirdly, the parents on both sides, in the interests of their respective offspring, aim to procure the best possible partner for their daughter—or son—available the circumstances as regards social status, respectability financial background, personal appearances, education general abilities.

Fourthly, the couple when married, realising the tremendous amount of effort, search and negotiation that went into the arrangements before their marriage become a fait accompli, invariably make the best of circumstances, prompted by the fear of offending parents and the remaining members of both the families should they behave otherwise, and mutually strive to make the marriage a success.

Separations and desertions are very rare, and divorces practically unknown.

Unfortunately, in Western countries with their complete freedom of individual thought and action, it is very different; and broken homes are becoming an increasingly common feature.

Another factor that appears to act very powerfully keeping the home together in India, is that the husband is accepted as complete master of the household, and wife is subservient to his wishes and command. The emancipation of women has not become the menace it might well prove to be when they get over-emancipated! Very rarely, indeed, is an Indian housewife to be found who dares to act differently to her husband's ideas and injunctions.

No doubt Western readers, particularly of the fair sex, who may scan these lines, will hold up their hands in horror and express their unstinted disagreement with and disapproval of these Indian customs. Please remember, fair ladies, I am just telling you about things as they are in India, and am not entering into any argument with you about the right or wrong, fairness or otherwise, of these practices. So, please don't quarrel with me over it. You are entitled to your opinion and the Indians to theirs. For the matter of that, so am I to mine. But you would not be interested, anyhow, in the latter .

Let no one think that the negotiations undertaken by a girl's—or a boy's—parents, in seeking a mate for their child, are simple and easy. Very very far from it on the contrary. There are so many things to be considered.

The girl's parents have to prepare themselves to bestow a gift of money, jewellery, or land in the form of a dowry, with their daughter. It is not very hard for you to imagine that, the greater the dowry the more eligible must the bridegroom, whose parents are attracted by it, qualify himself to be. If the boy is in Government service, it carries a very high degree of desirability to procure him as a husband and son-in-law. For one thing, he will draw a pension for his lifetime when he retires at the age of 55 years. For another, he cannot be sacked or retrenched. Dismissal from Government service only arises under two contingencies. The first of these is dishonesty. Under this heading may be clubbed embezzlement, robbery, the acceptance of bribes and other financial chicanery. The second is the commitment of physical assault, with violence. For instance, a Government servant may be sacked if he should hit the boss, or his co-worker, over the head with the office stool. Even then the constitution of the country, which seeks to protect the underdog from exploitation in any form, provides an elaborate system of chargesheeting, and the opportunity for explanation, and so forth. The offender, with some astuteness, still has chances to go free if he can prove the boss fell on the stool, and not the stool on the boss. So, a Government servant for a bridegroom, is indeed a marvellous 'catch'.

But should such a prize not be readily available, the next best substitute is sought in the person of the son of some rich man who is in business, or owns houses or land.

Another all-important factor in selecting a suitable partner is that of caste. Both husband and wife should invariably belong to the same community and caste. This is a very practical outlook, for a wife of higher caste would look down on her husband, and vice versa.

Then comes the horoscope. The exact moment of the birth of each Indian child, be it boy or girl, is very carefully and accurately recorded. According to the time, day and month of birth, professional experts cast a 'horoscope' in keeping with the principles and precepts of Indian Astrology. The planets are said to influence every moment of that child's lifetime, from birth to death. His or her lucky days are foretold; the whole future carefully forecast and recorded. This practice is followed in the case of every baby; boy or girl; of all except the very poorest classes.

Now it is not difficult to realise that the horoscopes of the pair

to be married should agree, for it would never do to unite a couple whose ‘bad’ and ‘good’ days were different. Indeed, it would be absolutely disastrous for a wife’s stars to be in the ascendant at the very time those of her spouse were on the wane, would it not? The Indians are, indeed, a practical people!

On the boy’s side; apart from trying to procure a bride who brings with her the maximum dowry in cash or kind his parents try to find the qualities of education, fair complexion, good looks, modesty housekeeping abilities, and all other virtues combined in the girl of their choice. Every Indian girl is a good cook by training from very young so that the culinary aspect presents no problem in particular.

Very naturally, all this takes some looking for—and finding—on both sides.

I have taken you a long way from the main theme of my story and pretty little Lalita, but it is necessary that those of you who read these lines and have never lived in India should both understand and realise the root cause of the trouble with the girl.

Lalita had everything it takes by Western standards to make an attractive wife. She was a pretty girl, with unusually brilliant grey-green eyes, enchanting eyelashes, and delightfully provocative slightly thick pink lips. Her budding young breasts strained rebelliously against the confinement imposed by her cotton jacket, and appeared as if they would at any time burst their bonds. Their softly rounded fleshy curves and the deep cleft in between the jutting hillocks made passers-by stop and stare; the young men with hope and anticipation, and the old with regret that Father Time had been so exacting with them .

Each morning Lalita would carry her heavy brass water-pot to the community well in the centre of the village, fill it and then balance it gracefully against her hip. With a swaying, rhythmic motion she would wend her way to the little hut she shared with her mother and two younger sisters, empty the water-pot, and then return to the well for a second supply. The youths would eye her lustfully on such journeys and the women in envy of her natural charm and grace.

Above all, Lalita had a vivacious and determined disposition.

But by Indian standards, at least so far as a ‘respectable’ marriage was concerned, Lalita was not so well off.

To begin with she was a Harijan, one of the ‘untouchable’ or

low-caste community who, up to quite recent years had been considered social outcastes of the baser order, and who were not allowed to marry above their own status.

Secondly, she had two elder sisters, and in providing the necessary dowries to get them married, her father had dissipated his slender resources as a petty merchant in a tiny, box-booth store.

Then he had died, leaving her mother in debt and herself and her two younger sisters unprovided for, with no hopes of any money to afford even the meagrest of dowries for any of them when their turn came to get married.

Well did Lalita remember her mother weeping over the dead body of her father, bemoaning his sudden demise, and loudly expressing her wish that she had died instead, rather than be left behind with three female children and the prospect of house rent to be paid to the landlord each month with no money coming in.

Bukthi, the landlord was a rich man; yes, very very rich indeed. Not only did he own over a quarter of the number of houses and huts in the village of Alamgarh itself, but he also owned some hundreds of acres of land surrounding it. He rented the houses, and the lands, to the villagers, and was most exacting when it came to the question of collecting rents from them. He would accept no excuse for delay should the monsoon fail and the crops die and the ryots be unable to pay him. Bukthi would just summon the band of hired ruffians he called his servants and instruct them to bodily throw the defaulter out on the road. The question of the farmer and his family thereafter starving to death was no concern of his.

The same principle applied to the tenants of the many houses owned by him. No tolerance or mercy was ever extended. The defaulter was put out on the street the very day after his rent became due if he could not pay it. If he dared to complain, Bukthi's servants would beat him, half to death.

When Lalita's father, Mendhe, had died, the house rent had become due. After paying for his ceremonial cremation her mother, Sita, had just been able to clear it. Thereafter, she had struggled hard to keep abreast of her debtors, but had slowly succumbed to the unequal contest.

Last month, for the first time, the rent had fallen into arrears. Bukthi had come to collect, and he now stood at the door.

He was a fat man too, yes very, very fat. His double chin gave his small head the impression of being connected to his barrel-

shaped body directly, without the presence of necessity of a neck at all. His huge belly overflowed the waist band of his dhoti and covered it in folds of flabby flesh. His breasts, even bigger than a woman's, were two sagging appendages, black hair between them and dank with a layer of perspiration, for the morning was warm and Bukthi was angry at not having been paid his rent which was due. A thin, muslin dhoti encased his elephantine thighs and was wound in between. So fine was the cloth as to be almost transparent in the bright sunlight. The darker shape of his gross body could be shamelessly seen through the thin material, for it was the only article of clothing he wore. He was bare-footed. Horizontal caste marks across his forehead from temple to temple proclaimed his superior lineage and social standing.

'Oh, miserable woman, where art thou?' he bawled, standing outside the door of the little brick-and-mud hut, and shouting lustily.

Sita heard and recognised the voice and her heart missed a beat for fear. Was it not cruel enough to lose her husband without being left penniless in addition? This fat monster would no doubt now order her and her three daughters out on to the street. She trembled and felt weak at the knees as she stooped her head under the low lintel of the doorway and went outside.

She was a frail woman of about fifty years of age; thin and with hair liberally streaked with grey. But her longish finely-chiselled features and grey-green eyes revealed the source from which Lalita had inherited her beauty. A sari, that had once been blue but was now faded to a dirty ashy colour could hardly detract from what would have been a stately appearance had she been dressed better.

'Why do you keep me waiting outside like a dog.' Bukthi thundered. 'I have come to collect last month's rent due by you.'

'I came the first time you called. Sir,' began Sita by way of apology 'but…' and her voice trailed to a halt in despair.

'There are no 'buts' with me,' barked the fat man. 'Either you pay your rent, or out you get. I am not running a charitable institution.'

Tears welled in the poor woman's eyes, brimmed over to her careworn cheeks and trickled down the furroughed skin. One fell, as a drop of moisture, on to the ground where it was immediately absorbed by the parched earth.

Unconsciously, the thought crossed her mind that even the soil

in this land is cruel. It grabs at my tears and asks for more. But then, the earth was dry and in need of moisture. This fat man before her had lakhs of rupees; yet demanded the paltry sum she owed of twelve rupees.

'Please. Sir, be kind to us and have mercy,' she pleaded, the tears running faster now. 'When my husband, Mendhe, was alive he paid you regularly every month and never once defaulted. I have no source of income or support now. Please, please give me another month's time in which I and my daughter may seek for work. Then we will pay you the rent for both months due'.

The scowl on Bukthi's face grew deeper. It was clear he was in no mood to have mercy, or even to listen to her.

'Miserable wretch!' he almost spat out the words. 'What care I for you or your troubles and woes. I want my rent that is due for last month, and what is more, I want it now. NOW, do you understand?' His voice rose to a frenzied scream as his fat belly vibrated with the vehemence of his words, and his double-jowls set up a queer trembling that he himself could not control. Bukthi would have appeared a comical sight, indeed, on a stage setting, had only the circumstances connected with the whole affair been less tragic than they were in reality.

Sita could find no answer to that outburst. She commenced to cry unrestrainedly.

Lalita had taken her brass water-pot to the village well, and having filled it was just that moment returning with the pot balanced as usual on her shapely right hip. She had apparently walked faster or perhaps filled the pot to the brim. Whatever it was, some of the water had splashed upwards and wetted the thin cloth of the white jacket, speckled with red dots, that she was wearing. The sodden material clung even more tightly to her jutting right breast and revealed its contours intimately.

Lalita had heard Bukthi's raised voice and her mother's weeping, long before she drew level with them. She knew the fat landlord, both by sight and reputation. She also knew that the previous month's rent for the hut that Bukthi called a house, had not been paid. She guessed that he had ordered her mother to vacate, and being of a decidedly determined and forceful disposition, she made up her mind to tell this loathesome fat creature just what she thought of him. They had nothing to lose in any case, as he would undoubtedly turn them out that very instant.

These thoughts passed rapidly through Lalita's pretty head, and by that time she had reached her mother. Very carefully and deliberately she lowered the heavy brass vessel with its contents to the ground, and then turned to face Bukthi with flaming eyes.

'You fat bully,' she hissed between clenched teeth without any preliminaries, 'if you have anything to say, say it to me. Cannot you see my poor mother is exhausted enough, as it is, and sick, too, that you have to shout at her, you fat lout. '

The virulence and unexpectedness of this quite unforeseen counter-attack fairly took the wind out of Bukthi's sails. For some moments he was at a loss for words. His heavy jowl dropped and his mouth hung open in the manner of a stranded fish, gasping for air.

The sight tickled Lalita's sense of humour. She began to giggle; and then laughed openly.

Her mocking laughter stung Bukthi to violent fury. By now his eyes fairly popped out of his head. 'You little slut,' he stuttered, 'mind your business or I will lay my hands on you and break your neck this moment.'

The laughter died in Lalita's throat. In turn, her eyes flashed fire and her under-lip trembled uncontrollably with a woman's desire to cry with anger, and her own determination not to give vent to her feelings.

A crowd of villagers had been attracted by the altercation and were by now surrounding the three participants in a wide and interested circle. Among them were a good number of children and these were laughing.

Bukthi lost control of himself entirely and went berserk.

Striding forward, he swung with open palm at the girl before him. Being a woman and unaccustomed to actual fighting, Lalita failed to dodge or parry the blow. It caught her a thudding welt across her face. Her ears sang with the impact and for a moment everything vanished before her, to be replaced by a reddish-white mist.

Then she remembered what had happened. Sobbing with fury, she reached up and tore with her sharp nails at the leering fat face above her, scratching furroughs of red through Bukthi's dusky fat skin. With both hands she tore, and scratched, and mauled. The blood began to trickle down his face. He backed in self-defence, while Lalita pressed forward her plucky attack.

The onlookers howled with merriment and appreciation of what was going on before them. Not one of them had any love for the fat landlord, and this spectacle of him getting beaten up by a sixteen-year-old girl was something that they were enjoying to the maximum .

As she attacked, Lalita abused her opponent roundly. And not only him, but in the usual Eastern fashion, all his ancestors that had gone before him. 'Bastard-fat son of a pig and descendant of a family of swine,' she screeched, 'you would dare hit a woman! I will show you what one of my sex can do. Take this-and this-and this.'

The crowd were laughing even louder.

In desperation Bukthi grabbed at the furiously-attacking figure of the girl before him. His hand clutched her right breast. He felt the pulsating softness of the flesh beneath, barely restrained by the thin wet cloth of her jacket. Meanwhile, his face burned from the deep scratches she had inflicted with her long, sharp nails. In retaliation he gripped the mound of her breast in his hand and tugged at it with all his might.

Lalita screamed with pain, while the flimsy material of her jacket tore asunder under the strain, to reveal a completely naked breast, topped by the plum-coloured protrusion of her nipple surrounded by its dark-brown areola.

'What goes on here?' demanded a voice of authority.' And then the Sub-Inspector of police, who had been passing by on his bicycle and been attracted by the crowd and the hubbub, broke through the circle of spectators.

Bukthi looked an ugly sight with the blood streaming down his lacerated face. Tears of temper ran down his cheeks. Lalita was also crying, her feelings a mixture of rage, pain and shame.

A dozen tongues started wagging simultaneously as the crowd tried to acquaint the police officer with what was happening.

'Hold your tongues,' he commanded; and then, turning to Bukthi whom he already knew and did not like, said, 'Now Sait-jee, what explanation have you to offer for this disgraceful scene?'

'I was but asking for the rent that is due to me and has not been paid,' Bukthi pleaded meekly, 'when this vixen attacked and started scratching me.'

'That is a lie,' countered Lalita between her tears, 'he hit me first.' A voice from the crowd spoke up. 'That is true, police Sahib. I myself saw Bukthi strike her first. '

The Sub-Inspector turned to the landlord. ‘It surprises me to see a gentleman of your status engaged in a street brawl with a mere girl. You had both better come with me to the police station, where I will file a case against the pair of you for causing a disturbance to the peace.’

Bukthi saw the further humiliation that lay ahead of him should the police book a case. He would become a laughing stock before the Magistrate when accused of brawling with a woman on the street. Besides, he felt the Magistrate did not like him very much, already. Twice he had prosecuted tenants who had owed him money on lands they had rented from him. Instead of making them pay, or punishing them, this Magistrate had shown leniency towards the ryots by allowing them more time. If this case came to court, Bukthi felt the Magistrate would really take a very dim view of it.

Like all bullies, he suddenly went to pieces when thwarted.

‘Oh, please Sir,’ he begged of the Sub-Inspector, ‘kindly excuse me and let me off. She is to blame and I am not at fault.’

The Sub-Inspector’s lip curled in contempt. ‘So, she is to blame, eh?’ he mocked, ‘and you are quite innocent, I suppose?’

Then he looked at Lalita, who had stopped crying. In the excitement of the moment she had quite forgotten about her right breast which was still exposed. The police officer glanced at it momentarily; then rivetted his attention upon it.

Appreciatively, he sucked in his breath.

‘Sir,’ Lalita said, ‘for the matter of that, we are both to blame equally for fighting in public. He struck me and I struck him. So take us both to the station and lock us both up.’

A glint of admiration displaced the dim film of lust that had been coming into the Sub-Inspector’s eyes. ‘Well spoken, girl,’ he commented. Then, turning to Bukthi, he said in tones of deepest derision, ‘Truly, fat man, you should be thoroughly ashamed of yourself. Not only do you strike a woman publicly, but you cringe for mercy and try to lay the blame on her. She, at least, accepts her part of it; but you have not even got the guts to do that. You… bastard!’ he muttered under his breath, repeating the word with a very bad epithet before it to qualify precisely the nature of ‘bastard’ Bukthi was.

Then he resumed talking, ‘Either you will apologise in my presence and in that of this crowd, to this girl, or you will come

with me to the police station. I will allow you exactly one minute in which to make up your mind.'

Bukthi stared dumbfounded. How could he, the great and rich landlord, possibly apologise to this little Harijan she-devil who had so disparaged him? But then he thought of the Magistrate, and what further disgrace lay in store at his hands.

'Well, time's up,' broke in the Sub-Inspector, 'come along with me; both of you.'

Bukthi made up his mind quickly. 'Just one minute, Sir; I will apologise'. Then, turning to Lalita, he quickly mumbled the words, 'I apologise,' ungracefully.

He looked at the police officer after that, who said crisply, 'Get out.'

Bukthi turned and walked rapidly away. Feelings of shame, mortification, rage and frustration tore at him, and vied strongly with each other for supremacy.

But through and above them all, he seemed to see a small, protruding, plum-hued, erect object. It was the nipple on Lalita's right breast which had been laid bare when he had torn away her jacket. There and then he made a resolution. He determined to humble the owner; by possessing her!

~

Another month passed, and strange to say Bukthi had done nothing more about his threat to evict Sita and her three daughters. He had not even gone near the hut they occupied.

Sita had tried hard to find employment for herself. Remarkably, there seemed to be none in the whole village. That appeared to be most unusual, as other women, older than herself secured jobs in houses and places the occupants of whom had just told her they had no vacancies. At last, she confided her concern to an old woman friend.

'Amlabee,' she said one evening, 'why is it that I am born so unlucky? Why is it I cannot even get a job? Others go before me and after me. They get work. But when I ask, it is always the same answer, 'Sorry; no vacancy.'

Amlabee, the old crone addressed, smiled darkly, 'It is not your bad luck that prevents you from being employed. It is that man, Bukthi.' Then she leaned across confidingly to Sita. 'Only two nights

ago the grocer, Ramdass, was here talking to my husband. I overheard him saying that Bukthi had openly circulated instructions far and wide that neither Sita or her daughter, Lalita, should be given work or financially helped in any way. I intended to tell you this before, Sita, but refrained for fear I should hurt your feelings. He is the one who is the cause of you being boycotted and debarred from being given a job.'

This news appalled Sita. She pondered about it for some days, and then decided to seize the bull by the horns and tackle Bukthi about it directly, without telling Lalita.

Next morning, she hung around the main gateway of the mansion of a house that was Bukthi's personal residence. At about ten o'clock, he came out of the gate clad in a tight-fitting tussore-silk coat, buttoned high at the neck. He wore the usual thin muslin dhoti, and a small black cap on his head.

Now or never argued Sita to herself. She accosted him, salaamed respectfully and then came out with what was in her mind. 'Huzoor, why is it that you have told so many people not to give me or my daughter employment? Rather, if you would but help us to get work, I will not only gladly pay your house rent, but the arrears of money I already owe you in this respect.'

Bukthi halted in his tracks. For a moment it appeared as if he would erupt into a towering rage. But his expression of anger slowly became supplanted by one of cunning as if an idea had suddenly come into his mind. With a sly look in his eyes and a totally unusual smoothness of speech, he replied .

'Don't be so silly, sister,' and then, glibly, 'whoever told you that? Why should I try to stop you from getting work? I realise that only then will you be able to pay my rent.'

He paused awhile. Then went on ingratiatingly, 'Look here. I am sorry about that quarrel we had. I am afraid I lost my temper. Most remiss of me, I am sure. But I will tell you what. To prove I bear you no ill-will and am genuinely regretful about that incident, I will not only wait some time more for the house rent but I will also lend you one hundred rupees, interest free, to tide you over your present difficulties. How will that suit you?'

To say the least of it, Sita was amazed. Could her ears be deceiving her? Or was Bukthi mad, or drunk?

She looked into his face, earnestly trying hard to fathom what was in his mind and lay behind those jet-black eyes. For once, her

woman's instinct failed her. She saw nothing.

Perhaps it was because she had plenty of other misfortunes to remember and think about. Not only had she failed to pay the rent, but she was heavily in debt all over the village. Only the day before she had tried to borrow the small sum of five rupees from the local moneylender. But he had laughed at her when she asked him.

'Do you think I am mad to throw away money to a destitute widow without a hope in hell of ever getting it back?' he had chided. 'Go on, get out of here. If you really want the money bring some security, such as a gold ring, nose ring, earring, or some other trinket worth at least fifteen rupees.'

'But I have nothing whatsoever left,' she had wailed. 'That's exactly as I thought,' he had cut in, 'so, get out; and stay out.'

And now Bukthi was offering her a loan of one hundred rupees, without security and without interest, and further time to remain on in his house.

It was unbelievable.

But the question was; should she accept, or not.

Indecision weighed heavily upon her. On the one side was the prospect of sheer starvation both for herself, Lalita, and, the two younger girls. On the other was a lurking doubt. Could this be really true?

'Well,' queried Bukthi beningly, 'do you want the money, or not? You must tell me quickly. I have a business appointment in another ten minutes or so.'

Faced with the temptation of immediate financial relief and a square meal for herself and her three daughters that night, Sita agreed.

'Come on back with me to my house for a few minutes,' Bukthi invited, 'and I will hand you the money.' Obediently she followed him, and waited silently in the verandah, while he went inside.

He was not long in returning, though. Within a few minutes he was back, carrying some ten and five rupee notes in his left hand. In his right hand he held some sort of printed form.

'This is merely a formality,' he told her, kindly. 'Just sign here,' and he indicated a place near the end of the form, 'and I will fill in the particulars that I have lent you the sum of one hundred rupees today, free of interest, repayable shall we say,' and here he again smiled benevolently, 'within two years. Will that be sufficiently long?'

Once again, and for the last time, Sita hesitated. Bukthi appeared to grow angry. ‘Please don’t waste my time,’ he reminded her. ‘I am already late as it is and cannot delay a moment longer. Do you want the money, or not?’

For fear he should change his mind at the last moment, Sita hastily scrawled her signature at the spot indicated, using the Parker 51 fountain pen he offered her for the purpose. Bukthi carefully allowed the ink to dry for a moment, folded the form and tucked it into the left hand breast pocket of his tussore-silk coat, remarking that he would fill in the details himself later, as he was in a hurry.

Then he counted out eight ten-rupee and four five-rupee notes, which he handed to her.

Sita took the money gratefully, bowing low in a salaam of thanks. And so she did not notice the gleam of satisfaction that came into his eyes, above her lowered head .

Another two months passed, but still Sita and Lalita found it very difficult to obtain steady employment. They did, each, get one or two temporary jobs which lasted a few days. But then they were out of employment again. Meanwhile the hundred rupees which Sita had taken from Bukthi, and of which she had not breathed a word to her daughter, were dwindling fast.

Yet another month passed, and the money was all gone.

Once more, in sheer desperation, Sita approached Bukthi, and this time, almost but not quite as readily, he volunteered to lend her another fifty rupees on the same terms as on the first occasion. And once again he contrived to make her sign a blank pro-note form.

Still another two months passed and the fifty rupees were also gone.

Steady employment eluded mother and daughter yet, while misfortune appeared to dog their footsteps. And that was the time when Bukthi chose to play his ace card.

He had come to learn of Lalita’s daily visits with her water-pot to the communal well very early every morning and one day instructed his servant to accost her there and tell her he wanted to speak to her. The servant did as he was told and delivered the message. Lalita who knew nothing about the loans her mother had taken from Bukthi, promptly told the servant to tell him to go to hell.

The servant duly delivered her reply.

Bukthi fumed within himself, muttering darkly, ‘You wait till I get hold of you you little bitch. I will make you squeal for mercy and I will show you none.’

A couple of mornings later, he waited for her himself, around the corner of the street down which she would have to walk to reach the hut she and her family lived in, at the lower end. Every little while he peeped to see if she was coming.

At last he saw her, the brass pot balanced gracefully on the right side of her swaying hips, walking towards him. He drew back in the shelter of the wall till she had turned the corner and stood face to face before him .

‘Well, my beautiful one, we meet again,’ he said banteringly. ‘I have some words to say to you.’

‘Get away, you fat pig,’ Lalita muttered defiantly, before I throw my pot, with its contents, in your face.’

Bukthi stepped backwards hastily. He had suffered a painful experience once already at this vixen’s hands, and knew what she could do at close quarters when aroused. He did not want to risk another encounter.

Putting his hand in his breast pocket, he drew out two printed forms.

‘Listen, girl,’ he grated harshly, ‘do you know what these are?’ And then, before she could answer, he went on quickly, ‘they are caned ‘pro-notes’. One of them indicates that your mother has borrowed one thousand rupees from me. The other shows she has borrowed a further five hundred. Altogether, one thousand five hundred rupees! She asked me not to tell you about these loans at the time she took them. Look, if you don’t believe me. There is her signature.’

Then, stepping a further pace backwards out of all possible reach by this hell-cat, he held up the documents in his left hand, indicating with his right forefinger Sita’s signature upon each of them.

Despite the distance, Lalita could clearly recognise her mother’s handwriting and signature. Her heart seemed to miss a beat.

‘Now, do you know what I am going to do?’ he queried, harshly, ‘I am going to hand over both these documents to court. Your mother will be arrested and thrown into jail for not paying her debts, beside her house rent which is now due for six months. I will even pay for her upkeep in the debtor’s cell; but go to jail she shall!’

Bukthi waited a minute to let the full significance the threat he had just uttered sink into this defiant girl.

Then he continued, ‘But there is one way of saving her. And only one person can do it. That one way and one person, is you.’

Lalita still did not fully comprehend what he was driving at. With mouth half-opened in astonishment and eyes that began to fill with tears, she listened to him .

Enjoying every moment of his triumph, Bukthi continued with evident relish, working up to the climax in the form of the dramatic announcement he was about to make.

‘Spend one week with me. Let me enjoy your body fully and to my satisfaction. Let me do everything I want to with it. At the end of that time, and provided you have been very, very nice to me and have done all I shall ask you to do, I promise you that I shall not only destroy both these bonds before your very eyes and forget about the six months’ rent your mother already owes me, but I shall allow all of you to go on living, rent free, in my house for the rest of your lives.’

Only then did the significance of his words and his threat sink fully into Lalita’s consciousness.

Her eyes flashed fire, while the teardrops, like stars, twinkled in the corners of each. Three words escaped her lips, ‘You unutterable swine!’

Never had she seemed more beautiful or more desirable to possess. Bukthi hugged himself in a paroxy of anticipatory delight.

‘I will allow you up till tomorrow evening to decide whether you want to save your mother from jail, or to sacrifice her,’ he continued. ‘After all, it is not much that I am asking of you, a mere wisp of a Harijan girl, in return for such a large sum of money and so many other benefits in addition. Don’t breathe a word to your mother or anyone else. If you do so, she goes to jail. Tell her you are going to the next village to seek a job and come to my house tomorrow night at exactly eight o’clock. Come to the back door and not to the front gate, as the neighbours should not see you. I shall be expecting you. And remember, finally, that if you do not come, the very next morning your mother goes to jail. That is all I have to say, except to once again remind you of the fact that you, and you alone, are the only person who can save your mother from imprisonment.’

With these words, Bukthi turned abruptly to walk away, and in

doing so almost tripped over a crippled beggar who had appeared as if from nowhere and squatted on the road behind him .

'Alms for a poor cripple, your honour,' he whined. 'Pray give me half-an-anna.'

'Get out of my way, you idiot!' barked Bukthi, irritably, 'I almost fell over you.'

So saying, he walked past the beggar without looking at him again, and disappeared around the corner.

They were alone. The beggar and Lalita.

No sound was to be heard, except for her convulsive sobbing. She was too simple a girl to consider whether it would be altogether possible for Bukthi to carry out the threats he had uttered.

'Do not fear, lady,' the cripple interrupted softly, 'you will be saved. I swear to you, on the word of Rajah Man Singh Rathore. Do not mention a word of all this to your mother, or another soul. And go to the back door of his house tomorrow night, at exactly eight o'clock as he has asked you to do. Enter boldly. No harm shall come to you. Once more I swear it, on the word of Rajah Man Singh. Do not fail to go.'

With those words the beggar dragged himself laboriously across the road and vanished from sight, without once looking back at her.

Lalita felt an overwhelming relief.

Even she, humble Harijan girl that she was, had heard of the countless instances of chivalry the great dacoit-king had shown towards insignificant people like herself, in the past, at their hour of greatest need, and how he had rescued so many from the jaws of impending calamity.

That very instant she made her decision and she made it irrevocably. She would not worry who the cripple was; from where he had come; how, in that terribly-maimed condition he could possibly contact the bandit leader in his hidden lair in the jungle or among the ravines so many miles away; or how she would be rescued from the clutches of the fat Bukthi the following night before he could rape her.

But she would obey, implicitly, what she had been told to do. She would, tell no one; and she would go to the back door of the landlord's house at exactly eight o'clock on the night he had told her to come.

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It was three minutes to eight the following night when Lalita stood irresolutely outside the rear entrance to Bukthi's residence. It was a moonless night, but the stars overhead twinkled serenely in a cloudless sky as if oblivious to the cruel fate that awaited her behind those closed doors.

Not a soul was in sight. The nearest street lamp shone bleakly about a hundred yards away. The doorway was in darkness and the door was shut, although a ray of light penetrated below it from the interior.

The clock on the tower of the town hall, nearly a quarter of a mile away, solemnly struck the hour of eight as Lalita timidly knocked upon the door. Glancing down the street as she did so, she noticed a solitary bullock cart turn the bend in the roadway, its only light a dim lantern, and approach towards the house.

Evidently Bukthi had been certain she would come and was awaiting her arrival, for within a few seconds of her knocking the door opened and she saw his obese frame silhouetted against the light from the room inside.

'Good evening, Lalita, I was expecting you. It is nice of you to have been so punctual. Do come in.'

His tone was suave and gentlemanly, and he stepped aside to allow her to enter.

She went inside.

Bukthi closed the door behind her.

And then, in an instant, his manner changed. Gone was the polished gentleman of a moment before. His features assumed a strained expression—the expression of concentrated lust. The tip of his tongue protruded from his mouth, and in anticipation wet his upper and lower lips. His eyes bored into her sari and appeared to undress her till she was stark naked before him. The perspiration of pent-up passion poured from the pores of his forehead, and made his face look greasy and glistening.

With both hands he grabbed for her breasts .

At that instant, Lalita realised that she was all alone with a sex-mad beast, and she screamed aloud.

As his hands touched her there came a loud knocking at the door, and a muffled voice announced urgently, 'Telegram.'

Bukthi stopped in mid-stride. He was breathing heavily and trembling with unleashed passion.

'Go away, damn you,' he shouted, 'bring it again in the

morning.'

'Cannot,' came the muffled reply. 'Urgent telegram. You have to receive it now.'

With a vile oath at being disturbed at such a time, Bukthi pushed Lalita into a corner of the room and flung open the door. Four men, instead of the one telegram messenger he had expected to see, stood outside. Before he knew what had happened, they were inside the room, and had closed the door behind them.

Bukthi opened his mouth to protest, when things happened fast. The tallest of the four men, a veritable giant, leaped upon him, pushing a handkerchief into his open mouth. His three companions pinioned his hands behind his back and tied them together with a cord they had apparently brought for the purpose. Then they bound his legs also.

The giant quickly replaced the handkerchief he had forced into Bukthi's mouth with a cloth gag which was knotted fast behind his head.

Unceremoniously he was thrown to the ground.

The four men looked around and the leader's eyes alighted upon a costly Persian carpet. This he took up from where it was lying on the floor, and the men commenced to roll Bukthi into it.

All this time they had been undisturbed. Evidently in anticipation of an evening with Lalita completely at his mercy, Bukthi had sent his servants home and was alone in the house.

When they had entirely wrapped the landlord in his Persian carpet, the tall leader cautiously opened the door and peered outside. Obviously he found the coast clear, for in a few seconds he beckoned to his three companions. They staggered under the tremendous weight of the fat man as they bore him outside, rolled up inside his own carpet .

Then, for the first time, the leader appeared to notice Lalita and spoke to her. 'Come along, girl. I offer you security in the name of Rajah Man Singh. Soon you will be returned safely to your home. Have no fear whatever.'

Not for one moment did Lalita hesitate, so great was her trust in the bandit king's honour. She followed the three men, staggering beneath their burden, outside. The giant came behind her and closed the back door of the house as they left it.

Lalita was surprised to notice that a covered bullock cart stood beside the kerb on the roadside. It was drawn by two bullocks.

Suspended to the wooden shaft that passed between them. A dimly-lighted lantern flickered faintly. At the front of the cart squatted the shrouded figure of the cartman.

Suddenly she remembered the cart she had seen approaching as she had entered the house. Man Singh's henchmen had timed their arrival correctly to the split second.

By this time the three men had pushed the carpet, with its human contents, into the cart. One of them got in with it. The tall leader wordlessly motioned for Lalita to enter the cart, also. She did so.

With a faint click of his tongue the driver of the cart started the bullocks and the cart creaked and rumbled down the roadway, the tall man and his remaining two companions falling into step behind.

To an onlooker, it was just an ordinary bullock cart, proceeding on an innocent journey. Inside of it were some members of a party of travellers. The rest of them walked behind. It had all been so simply but efficiently arranged, and looked so very commonplace.

Lalita admired the ingenuity of Rajah Man Singh and his men.

In course of time they left the township far behind and journeyed on and on. Despite the excitement she had been through, Lalita began to feel sleepy. Her head lolled forward and she dozed fitfully. Every hour or so the men would change about, and one would take turns to ride in the cart while the other three walked behind.

At about midnight they had heard muffled sounds coming from the interior of the roll of carpet. They had stopped the cart and unrolled it. Evidently, just in time. Bukthi was almost dead from suffocation and his clothes were sodden with sweat, caused by the terrific heat brought about through the carpet that was wrapped around him.

So the leader had decided not to replace it, but kept Bukthi bound and gagged on the floor of the cart.

Soon afterwards the road entered the forest and everything became as black as pitch. Giant trees, growing in close array, were interspersed with smaller ones, the whole joined and laced together inextricably by vines and jungle creepers, presenting as it were a solid and impenetrable fortress wall on either side of the road, extending high up to the tops of the trees. Only directly overhead, and following the contour of the road beneath, was a ribbon of sky,

clearly differentiated from the black phalanx of the forest on either side by the myriads of stars that twinkled and scintillated unceasingly, throwing off hues in their brilliance that bore all the colours of the spectrum. Other twinkling lights flitted about in the darkness of the foliage on either side of the road. But they were living lights; the phosphorescent lamps of fireflies, as they flashed their elfin glow now here, now there; now singly, now synchronising in hundreds; momentarily illumining the outline of the trees, only to plunge them again the very next second into a deeper, more impenetrable, gloom.

The lantern suspended on the shaft to which the two bullocks were yoked cast but a feeble light hardly two yards agead of them. The moving shadows, thrown by the legs of the oxen as they strode patiently along, seemed living things, demons of the jungle night that haunted them on their journey; steadily, inexorably, to an impending doom. The three men, walking close together behind the cart, appeared ghostlike phantoms forming a rearguard against any attempt at escape by the inmates of the vehicle.

It was shortly after 3.30 a.m. when Lalita, who had been dozing again, heard voices and felt the cart in which she was sitting come to a sudden halt. Then she saw the three men who had been walking behind, draw respectfully aside as other figures approached .

'Mohan, are they all here?' a rather melodious voice inquired. 'The fat man and the girl?'

'They are here, Maharaj Sahib,' replied the tallest of the three men whom Lalita remembered as the one who had evidently been in charge of the kidnapping assignment.

'You have done excellently, Mohan. Thank you,' said the owner of the melodious voice. Then, turning to his other companions who had not yet come into view due to the elliptical roof of the cart coming in the way, the speaker said, 'Carry the fat pig to the camp.'

Addressing Lalita, he said, 'Girl, you have nothing whatever to be afraid of. Please get down and follow me.'

Normally, any adult woman would have been terrified under the circumstances. She guessed that she was among the members of a dacoit band. But Lalita felt no fear whatsoever. A strange assurance of complete safety came over her, with mingled feelings of gratitude and respect for the great leader who had saved her from an awful fate.

Could this, indeed, be the redoubtable Rajah Man Singh?

Without a word, she eased herself off the hard wooden floor of the cart and on to the ground.

Then the mysterious man who had been giving the orders led the way motioning with his hand for Lalita to follow closely. She did so. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed four men lift Bukthi to their shoulders and start walking behind her. In the rear of them were yet other men. They commenced to walk through the jungle in single file, along some path evidently the leader knew well, as did his companions. In a few seconds the dim lantern from the bullock cart was lost to sight behind the stems of the trees.

Now the darkness became intense. Strain her eyes as she might, Lalita was unable to see the pathway at her feet. She stumbled. The leader halted and turned around. In the gloom she felt his hand groping for hers. She clasped it. He continued walking, leading her by the hand.

She never knew what distance they had covered. But suddenly the path took a turning and they converged on what was clearly a glade in the forest. The dying embers of half-a-dozen camp fires glowed around her.

The party came to a halt.

'Oh comrades,' spoke he of the pleasant voice, 'pile wood on the fires, for we are about to hold court. But first, let some 'cha' be served to the newcomers.'

The four men laid Bukthi, still trussed and gagged, upon the ground and squatted down around him. The leader said to Lalita, 'Sit down, girl, and be comfortable till the cha is served.' Then, turning to one of his followers he added, 'Bring a blanket for the girl; she is sure to feel the cold.'

From somewhere a blanket was offered to her. Lalita draped it around herself and brought the end over her head, for the night air was decidedly crisp and her sari was already damp with the dew.

Then she sat down on the ground.

The dacoit leader followed suit.

By this time the fires around them had recommenced to blaze, reinforced by the logs of dry wood that had just been piled on by the members of the band.

In the flickering light, momentarily growing brighter, Lalita turned to look at her benefactor.

He was an elderly man, light-complexioned and with a snowy

white beard, moustache and whiskers. He wore the usual dhoti and bandi. She noticed that, despite his age, he sat erect and had the bearing of a soldier with long years of military training. He had a surprisingly broad forehead which was smeared with wide chalk marks. A heavy string of amber beads hung around his neck.

But what was the most impelling feature about him were his eyes. They were steely-hard and piercing. Cruel as a Kestrel's, they yet seemed capable of turning as soft as any mother's as she gazed lovingly at her babe.

In a few minutes hot tea was served all around in enamel mugs, Lalita receiving her share immediately after the chief. Bukthi got his quota too, as soon as the gag had been removed from his mouth and his arms and legs released.

When they had finished drinking, the old man began to speak. And he smiled as he spoke. A curious smile. It appeared placating, apologetic, and yet seeking to be understood. It gave the impression of coming from a good-natured and kindly judge; yet one who knew he had an unpleasant duty to perform and was determined that justice should be served.

'We all do wrong and sin at times,' he said, 'for to err is human. It is bad if the sin we commit causes ruination to ourselves. But, if that sin is planned, diabolically, to encompass the destruction of another person, particularly if that other is innocent, then the sin is very great indeed.

'We shall now hold court to decide whether our brother here, one Bukthi by name who stands accused, has committed such a sin; and if he has, whether he should be punished or not; and what form that punishment should take.

'There are fifty-two of you here present excluding the girl, the accused and myself. I will cast no vote in the matter. I want you to judge fairly and before God, whether this man Bukthi is guilty or not; whether he should be punished or acquitted; and if you feel he is guilty, in what manner he should be punished.

'I don't want anyone here to try to please me by punishing him. I tell you here and now that such punishment will not please me in the least. Rather, it will grieve me. But if you honestly decide that justice should be meted out; assuredly it will be done.

'Now I will state the charges against the accused, one by one. You, Bukthi, will be given every opportunity to explain yourself and refute the accusation if you want. Only you must speak the truth

and nothing else. You will be given a patient hearing with no interruptions.

'Alright then; let me begin with the first question. Are you a landlord owning several houses and a good number of acres of land? Just answer "Yes" or "No" please.'

'Yes,' Bukthi's voice was scarcely above a whisper .

'Do you collect rents from your tenants?'

'Yes,' said the fat man again.

'How much money do you collect a month in this way? Now, before you answer, bear in mind that I already know. If you speak the truth it will be in your favour. If you should tell a lie, a hot ember shall be put on the sole of your foot.'

Bukthi commenced to tremble violently. Then stuttered, 'A few thousand.'

'We know that already, fat man. But, how many thousand?'

'About three thousand rupees,' came the reply.

'That is a lie, my friend. Altogether you get six thousand and seventy rupees a month. Am I correct or not?'

The landlord looked startled. There was silence for nearly a minute. Then he said, 'Yes'. 'Has this girl's mother paid the rent she is due you?'

'No,' Bukthi returned vehemently. Then he began to passionately plead his case. 'She has not paid for six months, your honour.'

'I am not "your honour",' said the old man, quietly; and then continued. 'And how much does she owe you, altogether? Now remember to speak the truth, for we know the answer.'

'Seventy-two rupees,' claimed Bukthi hotly. 'At twelve rupees a month for the past six months, she owes me seventy-two rupees.'

'I see; that happens to be correct, as I already know. Now, what proportion is this twelve rupees to the six thousand and odd rupees you get each month?'

'I—I don't know,' stammered Bukthi.

'You don't know, eh. But it is quite a small proportion, is it not?'

No answer came from Bukthi.

'Come, friend,' said the old man impatiently. 'If you won't answer a simple question, perhaps the fire will make you.'

'I suppose so,' admitted Bukthi, surily.

'Used to be paid regularly before?'

'Oh yes,' replied the landowner, with alacrity.

‘Then, why did she stop paying you?’ came the next question .

‘How should I know?’ Bukthi was becoming increasingly rebellious. ‘In any case,’ he continued, ‘who are you to ask all these questions? I am not bound to answer them.’

‘My name is Man Singh,’ said the old man, ‘possibly you have heard of me before.

‘It is also possible that you may have heard I have ways and means of making people answer, if they refuse. I really don’t want to employ them on you. So, I strongly advise you to reply; and reply truthfully.

‘Now what was that last question? Oh yes; why did this girl’s mother stop paying you suddenly?’

Bukthi decided to humour this devil. So he said, ‘Well, she said her husband had died and left behind no money.’

‘Is that true?’

‘He died alright. But how am I to know he left her no money?’

‘Fair enough,’ said Man Singh, ‘you have a point there. She may have been lying to avoid paying rent. Now let me ask the next question.

‘Is it a fact that you instigated your friends not to give her, or her daughter, employment, or work of any kind, when they sought for it?’

No reply.

‘And is it true you were kind enough to loan her one hundred rupees, and later another fifty rupees, free of interest?’

‘Of course,’ said Bukthi, spontaneously.

Then he realised his mistake; but it was too late.

Man Singh snapped his fingers to attract the attention of a rather short man of particularly dark countenance and clean-shaven, who stood among the crowd of onlookers, and then said to him, ‘Please show me those bonds, Mustafa.’

The short man addressed delved in the pocket of the black coat he wore over his long shirt, and brought out two pieces of paper which he handed over to the old dacoit.

Bukthi and Lalita recognised them simultaneously. They were the two pro-notes bearing Sita’s signature with which he had threatened her a couple of days before. It was evident that, after the kidnapping of the fat landlord, quite another party of outlaws must have been deputed to search his house for these documents. Lalita admired Man Singh’s thoroughness, while Bukthi’s bloated face

drained to a pasty hue. His eyes bulged in fear.

Man Singh unfolded the documents and studied both the sheets for a moment.

'Since you admit you lent her a hundred rupees and then another fifty rupees free of interest, how is it these bonds are for one thousand rupees, and five hundred rupees, respectively?'

No answer.

'I submit you are guilty of chicanery. I accuse you of lending this woman one hundred rupees first, followed by fifty rupees, and then adding a zero in each case and writing pro-notes for one thousand rupees and for five hundred rupees, respectively, to get this poor woman and her daughter hopelessly enmeshed in your clutches. Are you guilty or not?'

Man Singh's voice was flat and toneless. But it was penetratingly clear and precise.

Bukthi did not answer.

'And what did you say to this girl when you met her the day before yesterday?'

Again no answer.

'Surely you remember, great landlord? There was also a witness to what you said. Do you recollect the cripple you stumbled over? He heard you distinctly. And what is more my friend; I was that cripple.'

Lalita could hardly believe her ears. The accused's mouth hung open foolishly.

Man Singh continued, 'However, as I am not taking part in this trial by offering testimony against you, let us hear what the girl herself has to say.'

He turned to Lalita, 'Girl, what exactly did he tell you?'

In a low, but clear voice, Lalita told them everything.

Once more, turning to the half-swooning fat man, Man Singh continued inexorably.

'When this girl came to your house last night, what did you do? '

'N—n—nothing,' stammered Bukthi.

'Girl, is that true? You need not be ashamed to speak. We are your friends here.'

Slowly, but clearly, Lalita said, 'No sooner did I enter, than he shut the door and began to molest me. In fact, had your men not come in the nick of time, I am certain he would have raped me.'

A stony silence came over the assembly for some minutes.

Man Singh got to his feet. Lalita noticed he seemed taller than he had first appeared to be. Addressing the squatting group of men, he said.

'Comrades, you have heard the charges. To each charge the accused was afforded an opportunity to reply and defend himself. Now, be very fair in your judgements. What say you? Is he "Guilty" or "Not Guilty".'

There was a unanimous murmur of 'Guilty' from fifty-two throats.

'Should he be punished, or not?'

'He must be punished,' they intoned.

'What form should his punishment take?'

To this question there was lively difference of opinion.

'Flay him to ribbons,' advised one. 'Cut his throat,' suggested another. 'Bury him alive,' said a third.

And then a short, rather thin man, stood up. Lalita noticed that he had sharp features which gave him an intellectual appearance.

'Maharaj,' he began, 'it is my opinion that we should not kill him outright because he has not actually caused the death of anyone as yet. Further, if we do so, nobody will know of his misdeeds. Therefore, we should punish him in such a manner, without killing him, as to be a lesson that will deter other blackguards like him from doing such things in future. We should also write a letter to the Commissioner of Police Sahib, acquainting him with the charges and reasons for which we have punished him.'

There was loud and continuous approval of this suggestion from the throng .

'And how should we so punish him, Ali?' asked the dacoit leader.

'Maharaj Sahib; I have thought of that, also,' replied the astute Ali. 'We should cut off the tip of his tongue as a deterrent against telling such lies again; and we should burn the fingers of his right hand, for holding the pen that wrote these false documents and that later tried to molest this helpless girl.'

'Bravo,' shouted the dacoits in high glee, while a voice somewhere at the back yelled, 'Ali, you should have been a judge and not a thief.'

There was loud and prolonged applause and laughter, at that.

Man Singh was silent and appeared thoughtful. He glanced at

Lalita; then at the cringing Bukthi; and finally at Ali.

The smile he had been wearing throughout the proceedings suddenly faded from his face. His countenance became stern and implacable. He turned to the accused.

'I pronounce judgement,' he said solemnly. 'The tip of your tongue shall be cut off, and the fingers of your right hand burned in the fire. Ali, you shall supervise the sentence being carried out. But take care that it is not more than just the tip of his tongue, and only the fingers of his right hand.'

Turning to Bukthi, he added, 'And for my part, you shall never again demand rent from this girl or her mother, nor the return of the money you have given them. And you will not harass them anymore. Disobey me, and the next time you will die.'

'Mercy, mercy; have mercy on me,' wailed the unhappy prisoner, grovelling on the ground. 'I will never ask the woman for any money, but spare me; please, please.'

'Girl, come along with me,' commanded the dacoit chieftain. He held her arm firmly, but gently, as she got to her feet, and then led her away into the darkness of the jungle.

No words passed between them for the next fifteen minutes.

Lalita heard Bukthi's screams die in his throat with a horrible, gurgling sound.

Shortly later, there was another outbreak of incoherent moans and the smell of something burning .

Then Man Singh said simply, 'Justice must be done.'

He led her to another part of the clearing, where she was given two blankets and told to sleep.

The next morning she saw no signs of Bukthi. Lalita was given food and told to rest herself, and that she would be taken back safely soon. Till then she was on no account to attempt to escape. She remained a virtual prisoner for the next three days.

On the fourth night she was put in a bullock cart that took her to the outskirts of the town in which she lived. She noticed that a second cart was being driven in front of the one that carried her.

It was four o'clock in the morning when the two carts were stopped about three miles out of town. She was told to get out and walk home quickly. She commenced to do so.

Lalita observed another figure walking along the road before her. It was the figure of a very fat man. But he appeared bent, as if from old age or the effects of a serious illness.

Bukthi could not speak distinctly any longer. Nor could he use his right hand to sign documents again.

And one more thing. He never asked Sita or Lalita to pay him house rent or return him any money. In fact, he never spoke to either of them after that.

Chapter Six

The Three Travellers and the American Journalist

There is, somewhere in the south of India, a large industrial concern which is expanding rapidly. It builds aircraft, constructs railway coaches, and even makes buses to modern design.

This organisation has branches in many parts of India, and not long ago had opened a depot as far north as Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir.

The episode I am about to relate to you came to pass through a simple decision—the decisions by the parent organisation in the south of India to send one of its buses to its newly-opened depot at Srinagar—a journey by road of over 2500 miles.

A regular driver was assigned to drive the vehicle, and an officer of the company was deputed to accompany it. Also two mechanics were allotted to travel with the bus in the event of a breakdown, and to be of general help.

This officer's name was Othi. He was a North Indian, and came from the Punjab. A man of genial disposition and good heart, he felt the assignment would prove a tough one if undertaken alone. So he decided to throw open the invitation of a free bus journey to the enhanting land of Kashmir to two of his bosom friends, both of them also officers serving in the same organisation.

Of course, since these two officers were not travelling on company's duty, they were obliged to apply for leave for the occasion and obtained special permission to travel in the bus going

to Srinagar in their private and unofficial capacities.

The younger of the two officers was an Indian Christian; a tall, handsome youth whose name was Percy Rahu. The remaining officer was a middle-aged and stocky orthodox South Indian Brahmin, a person who came from a highly-placed and respected family, and who made it very clear from the start that he was fully prepared to share in the adventure wholeheartedly on one strict proviso; namely, that he cooked his own meals or ate exclusively at Brahmin restaurants. Absolutely cosmopolitan in every other respect, he strictly clung to his orthodox Brahmin custom of only eating food prepared by one of his own caste and community, failing which he would prepare it himself. This man's name was Seshagiri.

The disposition of Othi, who was carefree and wanted to enjoy life to the maximum, matched well with that of Rahu, the handsome youth who had an eye for the ladies and felt that, as life was lived but once, it should be enjoyed to the fullest extent. Seshagiri sometimes had proved to be a brake on their exuberance in the past, but at the same time, Othi and Rahu recognised that their more sober companion would be a valuable asset to the party, if only to keep them out of getting into too serious trouble at times, and to remind them of the fact that they had to complete the present assignment of delivering the bus at Srinagar on schedule, and then return to their home station by air, and on time.

We are not concerned with their adventures on the way, which is another story; but one afternoon found the bus halted at the ferry-crossing on the Chambal River. The time was 3.45 p.m., and the ferry-boat, a flat-bottomed, raft-like affair, was away at the opposite bank of the river, having just taken across a load.

There was nothing to it but wait till the ferry-boat returned.

The nearest road bridge across the river was over fifty miles away. The party might have driven the bus that way and had the benefit of crossing over by the bridge, but for the fact that all of them were strangers to the roads and had never been to this part of India before, road signs had been few and far between, and they had been inquiring their way all along. Hence they had been directed by short-cut routes and had finally come to a halt where the road had terminated and the river rolled smoothly past before them.

'Now what do we do?' asked Seshagiri, whom his friends called

‘Sesh’ for short, blankly. ‘How do we cross the river from here?’ By nature he was always a bit of a pessimist.

‘Arre baba, don’t let that worry you,’ spoke up the optimistic Othi, ‘there must be some way.’ And then, turning to Rahu, who had been driving, he said, ‘Percy, hop out and try to find somebody, and ask him how the hell we are to cross this river.’

Percy switched off the ignition, stuck out his long legs before him, leaned back and stretched his arms. It took a lot to worry Percy.

‘Nothing doing, Othi old boy,’ he replied at length, ‘I cannot speak this lingo in any case. You come from this part of India or at least from the north, so you do the finding, and talking—provided there is somebody to talk to. I can’t see a soul anywhere.’

‘Arre baba,’ Othi complained again, as he heaved his great bulk out of the second seat and descended to the ground. Then, ‘There is nobody here,’ he announced, ‘I shall walk up yonder hillock, a hundred yards away, and see if there is anyone in sight.’

‘Do so, laddie, do so,’ agreed Percy, ‘while Sesh and I take a nap. I have been driving this cumbersome rattletrap for the last two hundred miles and am feeling drowsy.’ With these words, he got down from the driver’s seat, walked to the rear of the vehicle, got in again and laid himself out on the bunk that ran along the full length of the bus.

The regular driver and the two mechanics got down also, sat by the riverbank, and commenced smoking beedies.

Seshagiri remained alone in the front of the vehicle. Some minutes later, he turned around and addressed the recumbent Rahu.

‘I say, Percy, I don’t like this at all. Where has that fool, Othi, gone to? Isn’t this the area we have been reading so often about in the newspapers where dacoits abound controlled by somebody by the name of Man Singh, who has been called the ‘king of dacoits’, or some such name? ’

But Percy had fallen asleep.

Seshagiri faced towards the driver and the two mechanics, all three of them South Indians like himself, and called out in Tamil, ‘Do you know fellers, that this area is infested with dacoits who raid at night and cut one’s throat from ear to ear?’

Nobody waited to answer that question. All three of them scrambled to their feet and hastened back into the bus and slammed the door behind them.

The noise of the slamming door awoke Percy.

'Can't you blighters allow a man to have forty winks, without getting out and then scrambling in again, like blue-arsed flies. Make up your minds for heaven's sake. Stay in; or stay out.'

And with those words, Percy turned on his side and prepared to fall asleep again.

But Sesh saw his chance and put his question afresh, 'Wake up, Percy,' he called from his seat in front, 'do you know we are in the area where Man Singh and his dacoits hang out?'

'Wasser that?' mumbled Percy sleepily, without moving.

'Wake up, you lazy bugger,' said Seshagiri once more, 'I am trying to tell you, for the third time, that this is the area where Man Singh and his cut-throat ruffians, hang out.'

Rahu sat up and ran a hand through his tousled hair. 'Do you mean the Man Singh we read so much about in the papers?' he queried, incredulously.

'I certainly do,' replied Sesh emphatically, 'him, and nobody else.'

'Oh boy, what luck!' exclaimed Percy, now thoroughly awake. 'I do wish I could meet the blighter. It would be an interesting experience. I believe he has many wives.'

'Who would cut your throat,' finished Sesh, sarcastically.

'From here—to there,' put in Percy, not to be outdone.

Their further conversation was interrupted by the return of Othi, who was accompanied by a tall, old man. He was a commanding figure, with high forehead, long beard and whiskers, and a most truculent-looking moustache. He wore trousers that were tight-fitting below the knees and baggy above. A faded brown cotton coat covered his dirty shirt. And he had a piercing pair of steel-grey eyes.

'I found this feller sitting on the other side of the hillock,' announced Othi with triumph. 'He says he is a Sikh, and that a 'ferry boat will take the whole bus across. He told me it has gone to the other side, and will return in half-an-hour.'

Then, addressing the old Sikh, he asked in Punjabi, 'What did you say your name was Singh-ji?'

'Ranjit Singh,' replied the old man.

His voice was melodious and strangely firm for his age.

'Get in, Ranjit Singh-ji,' invited Othi hospitably, 'Would you care for some tea? We have a little left in the thermos flask.' The old

man politely refused the tea, but got into the bus.

Othi went on to explain to him in Punjabi, ‘All my friends are from southern India and hence cannot understand this language.’

‘Then we shall speak in Hindustani,’ volunteered the ancient, graciously, ‘do they understand that?’

‘Certainly,’ broke in Percy. ‘In the part of India from which we come, we speak Tamil and Kanarese generally; and of course, English. But we all understand Hindustani.’

The old man smiled happily.

Then he queried, using Hindustani, ‘Tell me about yourselves and how come you to be here? Obviously you are strangers to these parts. Are you servants of the “sarkar” (government)?’

Othi thereupon launched into a sketchy account, and explained the circumstances of their presence at the ferry.

As he finished his talk, Seshagiri spotted the ferry-boat returning and said in obvious relief, speaking in English, ‘Thank goodness, the ferry is returning.’

Hearing him, Percy explained to the Sikh, ‘My friend is most anxious to continue our journey. He has heard stories about a famous dacoit named Man Singh who inhabits these parts, and is much afraid of meeting him. ’

Then he asked the old man, ‘Are these stories true? Have you seen this Man Singh at any time?’

Into the Sikh’s eyes sprang a merry twinkle. But he never answered the question. Instead, he asked another, addressing all three of them conjointly.

‘Tell me, Sahibs, are stories of this rascally dacoit really reaching as far as southern India?’

‘Oh yes,’ Seshagiri answered that one, ‘and to other parts of the world also. We often read accounts in the newspapers about his daring raids, and of how the police have been trying for years to catch him, but failed.’

‘What do people think of him in your part of the country?’ pursued the old Sikh. He appeared to be very interested.

‘Well,’ broke in Percy Rahu with a chuckle, ‘that depends on the people. Fellows like my friend there,’ he indicated Seshagiri with a nod of his head, ‘consider him to be a bloodthirsty murderer who kills on sight, and are mortally afraid. Personally, I should very much like to meet and speak with him. I don’t know what my other friend Othi here thinks, but you can ask him for yourself.’

‘Splendid fellow,’ put in Othi, jocularly, ‘a man after my own heart. I wish I could join him. I really mean that, you know. I would like to rob a few people.’

‘I wonder how sincere you are,’ mused the old fellow softly, in an undertone. With all that the others heard him and speculated in silence as to the reason for that remark.

In the meantime the ferry-boat had arrived.

They noticed that its construction was simple, consisting of a platform made of bamboos about twenty-five feet long and half as wide, super-imposed upon two ordinary river-boats, held parallel to each other by the platform itself.

The ferry could not be brought close to the shore, but was halted about twenty feet out in the river. The crew consisted of four men and a leader. Two of these men stuck long bamboo poles into the mud of the river bottom. The edge of the raft was allowed to come to rest against the poles which prevented it from floating down the river with the force of the current.

The leader jumped into the water and waded ashore. Then he walked towards the bus.

Othi and Ranjit Singh had stepped outside again. Othi addressed the leader of the raft’s crew, in Punjabi.

‘Friend, we are in a hurry and want to get to the other side as soon as possible. What is the charge for taking this bus across?’

‘Ten rupees,’ replied the leader, briefly.

‘Okay,’ agreed Othi, ‘now, what is to be done?’

The man gazed at the bus with a professional look, as if to gauge its bulk and weight. Then he said, ‘The ferry cannot be brought closer to shore. The water is too shallow and the boats will ground in the sand. You will have to drive your bus out into the river to where the ferry is. Don’t be afraid; the water is barely two feet deep.’

Meanwhile all the inmates of the bus had alighted and were standing by the riverside, assessing the situation.

‘How will the wheels climb on to the platform on the ferry?’ asked Othi.

‘We have taken many buses and lorries across before,’ said the leader, condescendingly. ‘I have two planks on board. We will wedge one end of each of them in the sand at the river bottom, and place the other end upon the raft. But do be careful to see all four of your wheels keep on the planks and don’t go off.’

So saying, he shouted to the other two raftsmen who had been squatting idly on board.

'Oh fellers! bring the planks.'

Each of the men addressed stepped into one of the boats on which the raft's platform was fixed and drew out a plank of wood. From where they were standing, they could see that each plank was about eight feet long, but less than eighteen inches wide.

The leader of the raftsmen paced off with his feet, toe to heel, the distance between the centres of the tyres on the front wheels of the bus. Then he waded across the water, stepped on to the platform on the raft, and carefully measured out the same distance again, heel to tow, marking the spot from where he had begun, and where he ended.

His assistants lifted the planks and shoved the ends into the water, taking care that the middle of the eighteen or so inches, representing the width of each plank, coincided with the places marked. That done, they stood on the planks in turn, to ensure the ends sank into the sand at the bottom of the river securely.

'We are now ready', announced the leader blandly, 'the rest is your responsibility.'

'For heaven's sake, Othi, let the regular driver do the driving,' counselled Percy Rahu, wisely. Then if he throws the blamed thing into the river, we won't be responsible. If one of us handles it and anything misfires the driver is sure to say in headquarters, just as soon as he returns, that we didn't let him do the driving. Then a hundred-and-one questions will be asked.'

Othi agreed, and called to the driver, 'Sattar, you are the regular driver. So take charge of the vehicle and do your stuff.'

Sattar, the driver, looked at the bus and looked at the two narrow planks. Then he scratched his chin, dubiously.

'Come along, man,' said Othi, 'let's get a move on. Don't be scared. It's really quite simple. I could do it myself, in a jiffy.'

'Then why don't you, Sahib?' asked the driver, pointedly.

'Because you are the assigned driver, Sattar. Why should I take the responsibility,' answered Othi, with a touch of annoyance in his voice.

Once again the driver studied the distance between the wheels of the bus and the narrow planks of wood facing him, leading on to the platform of the ferry.

Then he climbed into the driver's seat.

He pressed the self-starter, allowed the engine to idle for a few moments, and then raced it. Letting it run slowly again, he depressed the clutch, engaged first gear, and revving the engine slightly, removed his foot gently from the clutch pedal .

Slowly the bus moved into the river and finally the front wheels reached the two planks. The spectators noticed the water was abreast of the footboards on both sides.

Then the front wheels began to climb the gradient of the two planks.

But the driver had given insufficient acceleration to the engine, which spluttered and came to a stop beneath the load. He declutched, and the front wheels rolled slowly backwards down the planks and into the water.

'Accelerate more next time, Sattar,' shouted Othi, 'now try it again.'

Once more the driver started the engine and engaged first gear. Once again the front wheels climbed the plank. Then the engine cut out. The driver pressed the foot brake and held the bus in position.

'Go on, race the engine. Don't be afraid,' advised Othi.

For the third time Sattar tried. But he was nervous and once again bungled it. On this occasion, in removing his foot from the brake pedal to the accelerator he wasted time. As he pressed the self-starter the front wheels rolled backwards into the water. The engine started, and stalled.

'Damn it, man; what's wrong with you?' spluttered Othi. 'Here, let me show you.'

Regardless of his shoes and socks he waded through the water, motioned to Sattar to move over, and climbed into the driver's seat in his place.

Othi then started the engine, depressed the clutch, engaged first gear, raced the engine wickedly and let go the clutch.

The bus bounded forward with a jerk. The front wheels climbed the planks and came on to the floor of the raft. The rear wheels started to follow.

But in the various attempts that had been made, and with the front wheels moving back and forth, the plank to the right had gone askew. The right-hand rear wheel rolled off it and fell, with a mighty splash, into the water, dragging the left rear-wheel with it, which followed with a second splash .

The two front wheels of the bus now rested on the raft, while

the two rear wheels were in the water. The uneven weight caused the nearer end of the raft to slightly submerge, while the further end was lifted clear above the surface.

'Now you've done it,' said Percy, unnecessarily.

Othi tried to start the engine which had once again cut out. But the end of the exhaust pipe was below the surface of the water, and the back-pressure so caused prevented it from starting.

He got out of the driver's seat, scrambled over the front mudguard, and jumped on to the raft, from where he reviewed the situation.

After a minute he said, 'Let's replace the planks, boys, and try to push the damned bus up.' They did that and pushed with might and main. But the weight of the bus was too great, combined with the gradient. They could not budge it an inch.

The time was exactly 5.30 p.m.

Othi spoke to the leader of the crew controlling the raft. 'Is there no village nearby? Cannot you get some more people to help? I will pay you an extra ten rupees.'

That worthy smiled derisively. 'The nearest village is seven miles away, Sahib. Besides it is too late now, and we must be getting home ourselves for nobody will stay out after dark in these parts. It is a dangerous area. Man Singh stays near here.'

And he laughed mirthlessly.

Percy thought he caught him exchanging glances with the old Sikh.

Then he went on to add, 'Sahib, we will be back tomorrow morning and will bring some men with us. But it will cost you one hundred rupees to get your bus out of the river and not just ten rupees. And you must do it soon. Otherwise, it will cost you more; for you have immobilised our raft and we shall be losing business. Keep your one hundred rupees ready—that is, if you are all still here and alive in the morning and the money is still with you.'

At these words he, and his four companions, laughed meaningly.

Then they commenced wading through the water to the shore. 'Come back you blackguards,' called Othi after them, 'let us try once again to push the bus on to the raft.'

'There are not enough of us and it will require another dozen people to do that,' returned the leader, 'besides, as I have just told you, it will be dark soon and we dare not be abroad at that time. Keep a careful watch during the night, Sahibs,' he added,

addressirig all of them, ‘and take my advice—stay awake! That is most essential.’

Once again the whole company of them tittered and then commenced walking away. Only old Ranjit Singh, the Sikh, remained.

The six men who had come in the bus looked at each other blankly.

‘I do not advise you to remain in the bus at night, Sahibs.’

It was the voice of the old Sikh speaking.

‘There are many dangers. For one thing, the river may rise suddenly and you will be drowned. Apart from that, there are other dangers, too.’ His voice trailed to an end.

‘What dangers?’ queried Othi, deliberately.

Ranjit Singh just smiled an enigmatic smile, but did not answer.

‘Are you referring to Man Singh and his bandits?’ asked Seshagiri, nervously.

‘Maybe to his bandits,’ answered the old man, vaguely. Then he chuckled aloud.

What the devil is he driving at, mused Seshagiri, in an abstracted fashion.

‘If you will be gracious enough to accept the shelter of my poor hut for this one night, Sahibs, and such food as my miserable hospitality is able to bestow, you will at least be safe. Tomorrow will see you on your way. It is but one mile from here,’ he added apologetically.

‘Percy! Othi!’ interrupted the frightened Seshagiri, in English, ‘for God’s sake let us accept. It is far too dangerous to spend the night in the open in this awful place.’

So they wrapped up their bedrolls, and each of the six of them, carrying his own suitcase, bedding and such other things as were left in the bus, started following the old man, who led the way walking downstream along the bank .

At least he was fairly correct as far as his estimate of distance was concerned, for they had gone just a mile when they saw a neem tree growing about two hundred yards from the water’s edge. Under the tree was a grass hut.

As they came closer, a man came out of the hut, which proved to be larger than they had first thought by looking at it from a distance. This individual was much younger, had piercing black eyes, rather a long, oval face and a medium-sized beard. He was tall

and strappingly built, wore a turban like the Sikh and a similar type of trousers; but no coat. A long shirt hung outside his pants, reaching almost to his knees.

'That is my servant,' said Ranjit Singh by way of explanation. Then, addressing the man, he said, 'Ganga, prepare some cha for the sahib and their attendants.'

'It is already prepared, huzoor,' answered the servant, promptly.

The hut was a rectangular affair, the roof of grass supported by a long bamboo held at either end by forked sticks, some ten feet high, planted in the ground. The roof itself sloped downwards on both sides. It appeared to be empty, except for a small steel trunk and some clothes bundled on top of the trunk, the lot being stored in a corner at the further end.

The newcomers also noticed that a smaller hut stood at the back. This had not been visible behind the larger construction up to now. From this second hut came the delicious smell of food being cooked.

'Keep your samans (belongings) in that further corner, inside,' invited the ancient. 'Then you may go down to the river and wash; or bathe if you like. It is quite safe; there are no 'mugger' (crocodile) in this part of the river. After that, khanna (food) will be served. It is but poor fare, Sahibs,' he apologised, 'but such food as I have you are most welcome to share.'

'Thank you very much, Singh-ji,' returned Othi, 'it is most kind of you. I really fear that we are putting you to a great deal of inconvenience, besides eating up your reserve store of food. Pray don't bother. We have some tinned provisions with us that will serve the occasion and which we beg you to share. '

Percy and Sesh joined in with their thanks.

'It is very good of you, Sahibs,' said their new friend, 'but as long as you are the guests of Ranjit Singh, you must not refuse his hospitality.'

They could see that, if they persisted, it would cause the old man hurt, if not open offence. So they accepted with renewed thanks.

Just then the servant, Ganga, appeared from the hut at the rear, bearing a large kettle of tea and seven enamel mugs. He served his master first; then Othi, Seshagiri and Rahu; and lastly the bus driver and the two mechanics.

Greatly refreshed by the tea, the six of them took soap and

towels and walked down to the river for a bath. Within half an hour they were back, and now another pleasant surprise awaited them.

A clean mat had been spread in front of the main hut. As it was rapidly growing dark, a lantern had been lighted and stood in the centre of this mat. Upon a large aluminium platter, to one side, had been heaped a pile of freshly-made chappatties—there must have been at last fifty of them; and beside the platter stood a large degchie (a deep aluminium utensil), containing something else. For a moment they did not know what it was, as the degchie was covered.

'Please be seated, Sahibs,' Ranjit Singh invited; and then, to his servant, 'Ganga, spread another mat over there for the gentlemen's attendants.'

The old man uncovered the degchie to reveal its contents—delicious looking, and delicious smelling, cauliflower and home-made cheese, made into a curry.

'Here are plates,' he offered, 'but I am afraid you will have to eat with your hands. I have no spoons except the one large ladle for dishing out the curry. And, please take as many chappatties as you want, sahibs. There are plenty more in the kitchen, at the back.'

The curry was delicious and the chappatties soft and fried to perfection. Nobody spoke for the next ten minutes, as they were too busy with the food spread before them. In spite of Seshagiri's oft-repeated assertions that he would not eat anything that had not been prepared by a Brahmin like himself, he was so hungry that he ate heartily with the rest of his companions.

Meanwhile the servant, Ganga, served the driver and the two mechanics who had seated themselves upon the second mat he had spread for them.

Now and again the Sikh looked up and smiled a half-smile of contentment as he regarded with satisfaction the obvious relish with which his guests were consuming the curry and chappatties.

Fifteen minutes or so, later, they slowed down their eating. Almost all the curry was gone; and the chappatties, too. They had more than done justice to the meal.

Finally, with a bucket of water held in his hand a few feet away, Ganga beckoned to them. One by one they washed their hands as he sloshed the water over them.

Now that his stomach was full, Percy had been thinking, and the course of his thoughts apparently worned him a bit. Once or twice

he made as if to speak to Ranjit Singh, but hesitated at the last moment. At last he came out with what was on his mind.

'Tell me, Singh-ji,' he asked innocently, speaking in Hindustani and addressing the old man, 'how comes it that you appear to have so much food—and cha, too—ready on hand to serve, when there is just yourself and your servant here? Do you often have guests or people like us dropping in?'

Just for a fleeting instant his habitual half-smile died from the old Sikh's face. But only for an instant. Then it was back again, as benign and as pleasant, as before.

'No, Sahib; very rarely guests like yourselves. But frequently many buses and convoys of lorries pass this way and are held up because of the ferry. The drivers are hungry and come here to eat my food. Of course, I make a business of it then, by selling.'

Percy remembered that at the crossing-point the number of vehicle tracks showing in the soft sand had been comparatively few. Also the ferry crew had clearly said that remaining out after dark in this region was considered a highly dangerous undertaking and never done. Was their host deliberately lying? The traffic at the ferry-point was scarce; they had not seen a vehicle of any kind for the last hour.

'I see, Ranjit-ji,' broke in Othi, 'then you must really permit us to pay you for the excellent fare you put before us and that we have enjoyed so heartily.'

The old man held up his hand in protest. 'No, Sahib. This time you are my guests,' he explained, 'but perhaps if you pass this way again I might charge you with a little interest thrown in,' and he laughed softly at what he considered a good joke.

After they had washed their hands, they sat down for some more tea.

Then from the steel trunk inside the hut the old man took a straight and much-blackened clay pipe, together with a small cloth bag filled with powdered tobacco. He loaded his pipe, lit it, and drew on it contentedly, exhaling a stream of blue smoke from his nostrils and lips.

He said to them, 'Tell me some more about yourselves, Sahibs. Do you not work for the Government? Are you not the servants of the sarkar?'

Othi began speaking in Punjabi and told the old man all over again that they were employees of a private industrial organisation

in the south of India, and had been entrusted to drive the bus to the new branch opened by the company at Srinagar.

Ranjit Singh seemed very interested in all Othi told him, and asked a great many questions as to what sort of work the company to which they belonged was doing in the south, what work they were doing, what was their pay and positions, and so forth. Othi answered his questions fully and was pleased that the Sikh was such an attentive listener.

Then the old man said, 'A little while ago, while seated, in the bus by the riverside, you mentioned that this sahib,' here indicating Seshagiri with the stem of his clay pipe, 'was very afraid of the bandit, Man Singh. Why is that so? What rumours are circulating about him in southern India?'

Was it their imagination, or did his voice hold an aggrieved tone?

Percy heard the question and again began to ponder .

Othi answered with a laugh, slapping Sesh good-humouredly on his knee. 'You see, Singh-ji, this friend of mine has never left his part of the country before. He is a voracious reader of the newspapers, which make out that this Man Singh is a cruel and bloodthirsty outlaw who murders everyone he sees for money. Naturally, when our bus fell in the river, he was afraid that this brigand might come at night and slit all our throats,' and he chuckled.

But Ranjit Singh seemed far from amused. His smile faded and his face grew serious. There was a noticeably peculiar expression on it now. It was a look of resentment, mixed with sorrow; an aspect of apology, as of one striving greatly to be understood; a manifestation of hurt, struggling to give vent to its own excuses and wanting to offer its own explanations.

Seeing these changing expositions in the ancient's eyes and face, Percy commenced to ponder more deeply than ever before.

Whatever thoughts came to his mind did not appear to be very satisfactory or comforting, though. For Percy glanced around him, and noticed the utter blackness of the night that had set in by now and began just outside the narrow circle of light cast by the feeble and flickering glow of the lantern on the mat.

Some minutes later, Seshagiri said, 'It's half-past nine and I am feeling sleepy. Do you mind if I turn in? But you chaps can continue talking. It won't disturb me.'

Although he had so far given no indication of being able to understand or speak English, Ranjit Singh evidently guessed what had just been said. For he broke in, 'If this gentleman, or all of you are tired, let us go to bed then.'

'I think it is an excellent idea,' said Othi, climbing to his feet.

They all got up. In the meantime, having finished their dinner, the bus driver and the two mechanics had curled themselves up on the other mat and were already fast asleep.

'Sahibs, you must all sleep inside the hut. Yes, and your servants, too. I will sleep across the entrance and keep the lantern burning dimly outside. '

Othi hesitated for a second. Then he said, 'Singh-ji, I am afraid it will be frightfully hot inside at this time of the year. I think, if you don't mind, I should prefer to sleep out here on this very mat. It will be cooler.'

The Sikh turned on him, rather impatiently it seemed. 'Please do as I ask, Sahib; it is not safe for you to sleep outside. No, nor your servants either. They must also sleep inside the hut, along with the three of you. There is enough room.'

Momentarily, Othi felt like contesting the point. He did not want to be cooped up in the confines of a hut with five other human beings on a hot summer night like this one. But the old Sikh had already turned away apparently taking it for granted that he would be obeyed. He walked across to the three men sleeping on the other mat, and awoke each in turn by gently shaking his shoulder. As the three of them 'sat up drowsily, he pointed with his right hand towards the large grass hut and said in Hindustani, 'Un-dher chalo' (get inside).

Obediently the three of them got up and came to the grass hut.

In the meanwhile Percy closed his hand over Othi's left elbow and whispered into his ear, in English, 'We have got to listen to him and sleep inside. I think I can guess the reason, but there is no time to tell you now. God knows if the old devil understands English or not.'

By this time Ranjit Singh was walking back. He laid down the mat on which they had just dined to one side of the rectangular hut, and indicated that the three of them should sleep upon it, their heads to the centre and feet towards the outside.

Then he told the bus driver to fetch the other mat on which they had just been sleeping. The driver obeyed him. Ranjit Singh said

that it should be spread along the opposite side of the rectangular hut and instructed the three of them to sleep upon it, their head also towards the centre and feet to the outside.

In a very few minutes the six men had laid out their respective bedrolls on the two mats. They then lay down upon them in the positions the old man had pointed out. Percy was nearest the entrance to the hut, Seshagiri next to him, and Othi furthest away .

Meanwhile Ranjit Singh had spread his own simple bed across the entrance. Before lying down himself he lowered the wick of the lantern to a dim glow and placed it just outside the hut within his reach. As he settled down for the night he told them to sleep soundly without fear.

Percy was dog-tired and wanted, badly, to sleep. But he struggled against the feeling and strove to keep himself awake. Within a few minutes Othi, on the distant side, began to snore—a loud, gurgling sound with the exhalation of each breath; followed by a deep, rasping intake.

Sesh was breathing evenly, indicating that he, too, had fallen asleep.

One of the mechanics began to mutter in his slumber. No sound came from the other two men, or from Ranjit Singh at the doorway.

Percy began to think that he was grateful to Othi for the loud noise he was making. It would help to keep him awake. Because, at all costs, he at least should remain so. It would give rum a chance to warn the other two when danger eventually threatened.

For he was convinced above everything else that the six of them were in very real danger.

But tired Nature invariably asserts herself. At least she did so that night. After a vain struggle lasting for perhaps half an hour, Percy himself fell fast asleep.

He had no means of telling how long after that he suddenly woke up, or why. But he did; abruptly and very completely.

The lantern, which had been burning dimly at the entrance, had gone out and they were in Stygian darkness. Percy sensed there was somebody standing in the hut.

Then came a faint scratching sound and a match was struck. He closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep, but contrived to keep the eyelids of his left eye ever so slightly apart to see what was going on.

And he saw the face of Ranjit Singh, with match held aloft

above his head, peering at each of them in turn. Then the match went out.

This time, Percy made a better job of it at keeping awake, and remained so. There was no other sound from the Sikh. But he momentarily expected to feel the sharp blade of a knife stick into his chest, or perhaps its edge run across his throat. Involuntarily, he drew his chin inwards.

Quite some time after that, he did not know how long, Percy heard the deep, booming 'Who—o—o' of a homed owl calling some distance away. It hooted thrice and was silent.

Immediately it was answered by another owl. But this bird must have been very very close to the hut, mused young Rahu. Perhaps it was even seated on the top. Twice it hooted weirdly, dismally in reply, like a lost soul answering its mate. Then it was silent.

The minutes dragged by and Percy grew more and more nervous. A sixth sense kept pounding into his brain the message that they were in very great danger. He thought of awakening Seshagiri first, and then Othi; but considered that the noise they might make in getting up would surely give them all away.

Then he heard the faint whisper of voices speaking in a hushed undertone. It appeared to come from just outside the hut.

Percy turned his head ever so slowly, opened his eyes and strained to see out into the darkness. But he could make out nothing more than the faint outline of the entrance.

Two or three men were talking in whispers. He could hear their words. They were speaking in some language that he did not know. Punjabi perhaps; or maybe some other dialect. Of the six of them, Othi would be the only one who might understand what was being said.

But he was sleeping on the other side of Seshagiri, and he was snoring again.

Percy wondered what he should do. Then an idea came to him. Sitting up, on hands and knees he gently crossed over the slumbering Sesh and crouched down beside Othi.

Now came the problem of awakening him without causing him to make any sound.

Leaning forward on his right elbow, Percy blew air through pursed lips, gently but persistently, into Othi's face .

The rhythm of Othi's steady snore was broken. He gurgled and groaned. Then he turned on his right side, away from that annoying

draught, and continued snoring.

Percy propped himself up on his knees, lent over the stout figure, and continued to blow air gently, but steadily, on the sleeper's face. The snoring stopped; then started again. Othi gurgled and grumbled in his sleep.

Would this fat fool never wake up, Percy began to wonder, anxiously? Was he going to snore all night?

So he blew harder than ever before.

The snoring stopped abruptly.

Percy knew that Othi was awake at last.

Leaning over still further, Percy whispered very softly into his ear, 'Othi, Othi; wake up and listen. There are voices whispering outside. What are they saying?'

'Where? Who? Why is it so dark? Where are we?' Although Othi also spoke in a whisper, his voice seemed inordinately loud. Clearly he was confused; and also afraid.

Re-assuringly, Percy pressed his arm; then whispered again, 'Hush! Be very careful. Make no sound, whatever. Listen; what are they saying?'

Othi sat upright, so as to be able to hear better.

The voices were murmuring in Punjabi, and he could understand what was being said. He listened in silence for awhile.

Percy, who could not follow, was becoming increasingly anxious and impatient. At last he whispered, 'For God's sake; what are they saying?'

Othi whispered back, 'Two men are questioning a third. They say they saw our bus at the river and were about to set fire to it because it looked to be a Government vehicle. Then they decided to consult the old man and so came here.'

'Where is the old man?' inquired Percy.

'It is he who is talking to them. Keep quiet now, and let me listen.'

The whispering continued and Othi hearkened .

Then he breathed excitedly, 'Percy, they are dacoits.

I just heard them say so. Wake up Sesh and our men. We must escape from here while the going is good. Hurry.' Rahu turned and started blowing air against Seshagiri's face to awaken him, as he had done to Othi.

Sesh did not awaken immediately. Then, quite unexpectedly, he said irritably and aloud, in English, 'What the devil are you trying

to do? Let me sleep.'

The whispering outside stopped immediately, and they heard approaching footsteps.

In a few seconds they made out the tall form of Ranjit Singh at the doorway. This time he shone the beam of an electric torch in their faces. He saw all three of them sitting up on the ground, and noticed Percy was now in another place.

'So you are awake, Sahibs?' he queried, an amused jilt in his voice, 'and you have been listening no doubt, eh?'

They did not answer.

'Sometimes it is very dangerous for one to hear things not intended for him to hear,' he continued, seriously; 'but it doesn't matter this time. We will excuse you.'

Turning his head, he called out, 'Oh, my brothers and children; our guests are wide awake. Would you like to speak to them?'

There was an unintelligible murmur from outside which they could not make out.

Ranjit Singh addressed them again, 'Alright, Sahibs; bring your mat with you and come outside. It is cooler here and we shall talk.'

Without thinking of disobeying they walked outside, Seshagiri carrying the mat they had all been lying on.

The reflection from the stars, scintillating in myriads in the clear sky above them, cast a diffused glow over the entire scene. In that dim light they saw many figures standing around them.

'Spread the mat and sit down, gentlemen,' invited Ranjit Singh.

They complied.

'Well sirs,' he went on, 'one of you, earlier this evening, expressed fear of meeting the dacoits of this region. Another one of you said he would very much like to meet them. In fact, two of you said that. Those men's wish has been granted. Around you,' and here his voice assumed a dramatic touch, tinged with pride, 'are all dacoits.'

'And who are you?' It was Sesh who blurted out the question.

'I? Well, I am Man Singh, of course.'

There was a gasp of incredulous surprise from both Othi and Sesh. But Percy murmured, 'I thought so. I might have known it all along.'

Man Singh addressed him seriously. 'Young man, I had strong doubts about you from the beginning. From your demeanour, I know you suspected something. Then, when I came into the hut

after midnight and struck a match to see if you were all asleep, I found you pretending to be so while peeping at me with one eye half-opened. Death stood very close to you at that moment, Sahib. I began to think you might be a police spy. Don't do it again, young man. You might not be so lucky the next time. Remember, men do not sleep with one eye closed and one eye opened.

'However, I have decided to spare your lives and let you go free, as I think you are all harmless and innocent. Also, I want you to do me a favour. I want you to take a personal message from me, and when you go back I want you to tell as many people as you can what I am now about to say to you. Tell it to the Government; tell it to big people; tell it to the newspapers; tell it to the poor; tell it to the rich; tell it far and wide.

'In fact, give my message to the whole of India and to the whole world.'

Man Singh's voice rose in crescendo and vibrated with earnestness.

'Listen carefully, then. This is the message I am about to give you.

'Man Singh Rathore, the dacoit, sends his greetings and this message to the Government and the people of India and to the people of the world.

'He was an honest, upright man, coming from an honest family, till some wicked people besmirched his honour and disgraced his family. The law was powerless to punish the evil individual who had first accused this innocent man and dragged his family's name into the dust. So I, Man Singh, who was that innocent man, punished that wrongdoer for the evil he had performed.

'Because I destroyed him and his vagabond brood, the law calls me a murderer. Why did it not punish him for what he did? Then it would have been a just law. Now it is an unjust law; seeking only to protect the rich and powerful against the poor and weak.

'I, Man Singh, am here to oppose this unjust law. I seek to help the poor and weak against the rich and powerful.

'Was I such a bad man as people sometimes say, I could kill and rob all of you right now. I know you each have money with you. I could also burn your bus to ashes.

'But I will not do it as you have harmed no one and I have no quarrel with you.

'Tell the people of India when you go away from here, Sahibs,

that Man Singh is a true son of India and brother of theirs. He loves the country and is proud of being an Indian; and he loves them, too. But he hates oppression and injustice in any form, whatever.

'Therefore, Man Singh will continue to fight such oppression and injustice to the very end till he conquers them; or, maybe, till they conquer him; who knows?

'That is my message, Sahibs; and I entrust the three of you, on your word of honour as gentlemen, to deliver it to India, and, through India, to the rest of the world.

'At dawn today, before the crew of the raft returns, my men will put your bus on board. Rajah Man Singh Rathore, has spoken.'

And so it came to pass that, when the leader and the four members of the crew of the raft, accompanied by many other men from the village, turned up at about seven o'clock that morning, expecting to make at least one hundred rupees from the stranded strangers by pushing their bus on to the raft, they were petrified with amazement to find the work already accomplished and the bus safe and sound on board the raft, with all six of the men who had travelled in it sitting unconcernedly inside, smoking cigarettes .

Now would any of the six tell them how that miracle had been accomplished.

And they only received ten rupees for themselves, which was the normal fee for ferrying any bus or lorry across the river.

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This incident, strange in itself, brought a still stranger sequel.

Othi and his two companions returned by air to their headquarters in the south after leaving the bus at Srinagar; the driver and the two mechanics travelling by the slower train route.

Once back, all six of them as might have been expected kept to their promise and gave wide propaganda to their adventure, and Man Singh's personal message was repeated far and wide.

Most people did not believe them and felt their story was but an ingenious improvement on the usual fisherman's yarn. Could it be possible that the notorious murderer Man Singh who had spent so many years of his lifetime slitting people's jugulars, had not only spared them but had refrained from robbing them and well, in addition to feeding them and putting their vehicle safely on the ferry-boat? It was far too much to believe and should be taken with

more than the proverbial pinch of salt!

But here and there, few and far between, people did believe them and the reputation for nobleness of Rajah Man Singh became enhanced.

And thus it came to pass that an American journalist, touring India in his private capacity, came to hear the story.

He did not know whether to credit it or not. So like most Yanks, he decided to do the common sense, plain thinking thing.

He made up his mind to first meet the men who had brought the story, and judge for himself whether they appeared to be reliable types of people or just obvious liars.

And he decided that, if he felt they were telling the truth, he would visit Man Singh if possible himself, and get the message at first hand from his lips to convey it himself to the people of the United States of America.

Thus he made it his business to trace the story to its origin and met Othi, Rahu and Seshagiri. All three of them assured him they had been speaking the plain truth, and produced the bus driver, Sattar, and the two mechanics who had been with them, as further evidence.

The journalist was satisfied. He waited just long enough to find out where all this had happened and what would be the shortest route to the ferry-crossing where the bus had been held up.

Then he got there.

Let us hand it to this Yank for being a brave man. Bear in mind he was a total stranger to India and could not speak a single word of any dialect. Yet he proposed to call upon Man Singh at his own headquarters in the midst of the Chambal ravines.

Now Johnny Carter, which was the American's name, had plenty of common sense and grit to make up for the handicaps of not knowing the people, country or language. Also, like all Yanks, he appeared to have a fair amount of money.

He hired three interpreters who could speak English, and through them came to learn all the current stories and rumours about Man Singh that were afloat, in order to find out all he could about the outlaw chief.

Thus it came to pass that, amongst other things, he found out that the bandit leader was easily accessible through his hundreds of spies, informers and secret agents, to all who sought him for good and sufficient reasons.

Next, he told his three assistants to go into the marketplaces of the towns in the area, and into the villages too, and spread his message to the dacoit leader among all the people.

'Tell Rajah Man Singh Rathore that an American journalist craves audience with him. This American has heard and received the message the Rajah gave to the six men who came by bus and were stranded at the ferry, to give to the people of India. The American Sahib would hear it himself from the Rajah's own lips so as to be able to deliver it with assurance to the millions of people in his own country of America far beyond the seas. For this purpose the American is prepared to entrust the Rajah with his life and to come alone and unarmed to whatever place the Rajah may bid him.'

Having sent out the message through his interpreters, John Carter camped in a certain Travellers' Bungalow to await results.

These came on the third day. One of his interpreters brought the news.

He was highly excited. 'Carter Sahib,' he said, 'last night there came a tapping at the window of the room in which I was sleeping. Wondering who it could be, I glanced at the clock. It showed one o'clock in the morning. I opened the window but saw nobody. Then from the darkness in front of me a voice said, 'Tell the American Sahib that the Rajah has received his message and will gladly give him audience. If he is speaking the truth, not a hair of his head shall be harmed. If this is a police trap or he is lying, he will not see another sunrise. Tell him to start walking on the main road which leads to the town of Bhind at midnight tomorrow night. He is to tell nobody—not a single soul. The Rajah will find his own means of contacting the American. And there is one other thing. Should any ambush or trap be laid due to this message, both the American and you will be killed. That is the message of Rajah Man Singh Rathore.'

'That is all, Carter Sahib. For God's sake be careful and tell nobody else what I have said. If you do, we shall surely both be killed.'

Johnny smiled very happily. He would tell nobody. And he would certainly keep the appointment.

At midnight the following day he left the gates of the friendly Travellers' Bungalow behind him. The road to Bhind passed directly in front of the building and led to the west.

So Johnny turned in that direction and walked onwards.

He walked for more than an hour and did not know how far he had come. As it was, the darkness was so intense that he had difficulty in keeping to the road itself. Had it not been for the trees growing on both sides he would have definitely strayed off it.

Suddenly things happened!

Without a sound or warning of any kind, John felt himself grabbed by two pairs of powerful arms, while a black cloth descended over his head.

This is it, he thought; and offered no resistance whatever.

More pairs of hands roped his arms behind him and his feet together. Then he was bodily lifted up and carried some distance.

Through the cloth over his head he thought he heard the neigh of a horse. He was right, for shortly afterwards the men who were carrying him lowered him to the ground and his feet were untied.

Then again they lifted him, but only long enough to guide his foot over the saddle of a horse. He felt the presence of a rider behind him. Strong arms encircled him from the back and took the reins. The horse started trotting at a slow canter. He could hear the hooves of other horses accompanying them, one on either side.

They rode for hours on end. Then the three horses were brought to a halt. John Carter was let down and led over the threshold of a building. Once inside, his arms were untied and the thin black bag removed from over his head.

He blinked his eyes and was surprised to find it was daylight. Two men, armed with double-barrelled shotguns stood at the door through which he had just entered.

Food was offered to him, and hot tea. Then a mat was brought, and he was motioned to lie down upon it and rest.

Despite the discomfort he had suffered for so long with the bag over his head and the ropes that had hurt his arms, John was well satisfied. His hopes were materializing. He fell asleep with that thought.

When night fell again the journey was continued. But by this time his captors had evidently come to believe that there was no trick in it, and that their prisoner was alone and unfollowed. They did not put the black bag over his head, but just blindfolded him with a towel. Nor did they tie his hands behind him .

Once again, with a man mounted behind him on the horse, John rode forward into the unknown.

Later in the night the horses were halted and he was taken

down from the saddle. With hands holding his arms on either side to guide him, John was led forward.

They seemed to walk for hours and hours. The going was very rough and he tripped many times due to the cloth over his eyes, and would have fallen had not the arms on either side supported him. The terrain led continuously up and down. Carter began feeling exhausted.

Suddenly, out of the stillness, rang a challenging voice. The men around him answered something which of course Johnny could not understand. Then he was led forward again. He felt the chill of dawn and shivered a little.

At last that interminable walk came to an end. He heard the sound of voices and the hands holding his arms released him. He felt them fiddling at the knot of the cloth that had been used to blindfold him. Finally it was whisked away.

Before him stood a tall old man with abnormally high forehead, crowned with a tall turban. He had a flowing white beard, whiskers and a huge moustache. He was wearing a tight-fitting waistcoat of a maroon colour and white pants, made of silk, loose above the knee and very close-fitting below.

The old man bowed slightly, and salaamed in the fashion of the old days of regal India by raising his right hand and touching his forehead with his fingertips, palm turned inwards.

John Carter returned the greeting with a modern Indian ‘namaste’, by joining his two hands together before his face, palms and fingers touching each other, in the manner he had been taught to do.

‘Welcome to the humble abode of Man Singh,’ said the old man, in Hindustani.

But Johnny did not understand one word of what was being said. Instead, he looked interestedly at his surroundings.

Obviously they were in a cave of some sort, as the place was illumined by the light of four lanterns, suspended from the walls at different points. Besides Man Singh and the two men who had brought him, there were two others in the place. One of these latter carried a tommy gun in the crook of his arm. The other was a tall young man, unmistakably the old man’s son, as he had the same high forehead and steely, boring eyes.

Man Singh noticed that the white man did not understand his welcome, and then remembered that he was an American and

therefore unlikely to be conversant with any Indian language.

He turned to the young man beside him, and said, 'Tehsildar, my son, call Prithvi. He understands the white man's tongue and can speak to the American sahib.'

The young man so addressed went out of the cave. In about ten minutes he was back again, accompanied by a short, very dark wiry man of about 35 years of age, with a hooked nose and only one eye. The left eye. He was clean shaven.

Man Singh addressed the newcomer and spoke for awhile. Then Prithvi in turn addressed Johnny in quaintly-worded English.

'Maharaj Sahib, he say he very glad you come. You welcome. You eat something first; yes, no? Drink cha-tea? Then you tell Maharaj Sahib what you want, eh? Yes, no?'

John Carter was glad he could at last converse with the famous dacoit even if it was to be through an interpreter like the man who was now doing the talking. He said to Prithvi, 'Please tell the Rajah Sahib I am mighty grateful he granted me an audience, and I am glad to be here. Tell him that I heard the message he sent to the people of India and to the world through those folk he helped in the bus that got all bogged-up in the river. If he will be good enough to give me that message directly, I shall be real proud and happy to carry it to my own people in the U.S.A., thousands of miles from here.'

Prithvi took some time to translate this message to his leader, but at last finished talking.

The handsome old brigand was obviously greatly flattered and pleased. And proud, too. 'Tell the sahib,' be said, 'that today he shall be my guest. Let him rest first and feast with me. I shall show him my armoury and my treasure chest. Then tonight I shall deliver my message and send him safely back to the outer world. Also convey my apologies for the discomforts of the journey, but he will realise that I was compelled to take precautions.'

Prithvi interpreted all this to John in his quaint way. The American was touched. Spontaneously he held out his right hand to the dacoit leader. The old man took it between both of his and shook it warmly.

Then John was led through a passage in the wall of the cave which he had to negotiate bent almost double to an adjoining cave. Here food and water were served and he rested awhile on a carpet and silken pillows that had been provided for him.

At midday, more food was served. Prithvi appeared with it and said, ‘You come after eating to Rajah Sahib? He show you pretty jewels; plenty, plenty. Also ‘bundooks’ (firearms); he got plenty more.’ Then he ended with his characteristic, ‘Yes, no?’

John ate heartily of the dry fried meat that was served, along with many thin, freshly-cooked delicious chappatties, dripping in ghee. He was given a large tumbler ot goat’s milk after that, followed by a juicy watermelon. When he had finished eating and washed his hands, he stood up and announced he was eager to meet the dacoit-king again.

Prithvi led him along the same passage he had come by earlier and into the same cave where he had first met Man Singh.

The old bandit was there, but Carter noticed the man with the tommy gun had been changed. Also the son, Tehsildar, whom he had met the last time, was not present. In his place was a taller man, slightly older and having a pair of twinkling, jet-black eyes. He wore a black beard and a high, saffron-yellow turban.

Man Singh stretched out both his hands to shake John Carter’s right hand again. Then he introduced his companion, through Prithvi. ‘This is my beloved second son, Subedar Singh,’ adding in an undertone, ‘my eldest son, Jaswant Singh, was killed by the police years ago. ’

Subedar greeted John pleasantly, with a welcoming, sincere handshake.

‘I will show the American sahib my armoury first,’ announced Man Singh.

At a signal from him, his bodyguard stooped down and opened a trap door that was concealed under a sheepskin laid on the floor of the cave. Man Singh led the way; the bodyguard followed. Then Subedar Singh invited John to go next. He came immediately behind, with Prithvi bringing up the rear.

They descended six or seven steps cut in the earth, into a low, dark room lit by two lanterns, both suspended from the ceiling. John noticed that there were weapons all around him. Along the further side of the room were lines of wooden rifle-racks. Neatly arranged in them were rows of .393 army service rifles. Along the next wall was another rack. This held a miscellaneous collection of firearms of all description and vintage. There were some modern big-game double-barrelled rifles among them, including a Jeffries .470 cordite rifle and a .500 blackpowder express; many .12 bore

shotguns, a couple of them made by such famous makers as Holland & Holland, and three by Greener. And there were some single-barrelled .12 bore and .16 shotguns, too. Along the third wall were arranged the muzzle-loaders; some fairly modern and others very ancient, flintlock weapons. In between these were revolvers and pistols of all makes, shapes and sizes. The last wall of the armoury boasted the cream of the collection. They were British Army-issue Sten guns and tommy guns, mixed with Japanese and Italian automatic weapons, obviously all relics of World War II.

'Still further underground,' indicated Man Singh through the interpreter, 'are our hand-grenades, some bombs, and stores of gunpowder. But it is unsafe to go there just now with lighted lanterns.'

They reascended the earthern staircase to the cave above. Here Man Singh led John to a medium-sized iron safe standing by itself in a corner. He opened the door .

Against the back of the safe, bundled, tied and stacked closely together, were piles of one-hundred-rupee notes. How many such bundles there were he did not count.

In front of the stacks of notes stood a tin box.

Man Singh opened the box for John to gaze at its contents. There he saw gold watch-chains, diamond rings, and necklaces of gold set with emeralds, rubies and other, precious stones; women's golden nose rings and earrings; and trinkets of all descriptions, large and small. Among the collection was a very valuable gold watch of obviously old European make. Man Singh took it out and held it up for John to see. Then he wound it and listened gleefully as it chimed prettily, and struck the hour.

When Man Singh had closed the safe, he turned to the American and said, through Prithvi, 'Go back and rest now, sahib. Tonight you shall have dinner with me and a few guests. After that I will give you my message for your people and send you back, safely.'

That dinner was a memorable event. Man Singh sat John next to him on his left on the floor of the cave while his armed bodyguard stood behind. To the right of the chieftain sat Subedar Singh. To John's left was Tehsildar Singh. There were also five others present whom Man Singh variously introduced as Nawab Singh his elder brother; and four of his lieutenants, Charna, Roopa, Lakhan Singh and Devi Singh. The last invitee to the banquet was the interpreter, Prithvi.

The meal consisted of several courses of well-cooked food, all entirely strange to the American journalist. To end the feast, a bottle of Exshaw Brandy was opened; and finished by them. Only Man Singh himself never touched a drop.

Finally came the closing enactment in the whole unusual drama. Man Singh delivered his message for John Carter to convey to the American people, to England and the world, and Prithvi interpreted it in his comical way.

But it is far too great and wonderful a message to be spoilt by repeating it in the way in which Prithvi said it, although he did his best as interpreter with the poor knowledge of English at his command. So, rather let us render it as Man Singh originally gave it in his own mother tongue, the dialect of Rajasthan.

'To the President and the people of the United States of America; to the Sovereign and the People of England and the British Empire; and to the People of all the World; I, Rajah Man Singh Rathore, send by you, John Carter, my warmest greetings.

'I am no thief or brigand by choice or by nature. Evil men made me so.

'As the people of all your countries fought, and still fight, for that which is right, so do I fight now. I love my country, India; and I am proud of being one of her sons. I would not exchange this heritage for any other.

'But I grieve over the evil that still happens here, just as it still happens in your lands. Tell all your people to join me in fighting against oppression of the poor in all its forms in all our lands, wherever such wicked practices may exist.

'Only then will my country and your countries become great—and remain great—for all time!

'Many of us will fall in this fight and lose our freedom and even our lives, for the forces of evil are widespread and powerful. But those who die for this cause shall live forever in the histories and memories of the peoples of their lands. Is not that worthwhile? Is it not the greatest reward a man could seek?

'Speak this message aloud, John Carter. Write it in a book and send it to all the countries of the world. For then you will be serving a good cause, and a noble one. And may God be with you always.

'I, Rajah Man Singh Rathore, have spoken.'

From the third finger of his right hand, Man Singh removed a

gold ring, set with a single blood-red ruby. He handed it to John Carter directly, saying to Prithvi,

'Tell the American Sahib to please accept it as a personal gift from me; to keep it and wear it, in remembrance of me. Tell him it is my own ring; not stolen from anyone.'

And the illustrious old man shook with laughter at his own joke .

John Carter began the journey back later that night. He was not bound this time, nor was the black bag put over his head. He was merely blindfolded. And it was done with his consent and in his own interest. For then he could truthfully answer the authorities that he did not know the way to Man Singh's secret cave.

What happened thereafter is not known in India. But we sincerely hope John delivered the great message entrusted to him that day.

Perhaps, as he gazes at that gold ring and that blood-red ruby, his memory conjures up a picture of that grand old bewhiskered warrior, imbued with the solemn and noble principles of the cause for which he was prepared to lay down his life and become a martyr—Man Singh, the gentleman dacoit.

Chapter Seven

The History of Man Singh

Rajasahib Man Singh Rathore, king of the Dacoits of India, did not earn his distinction easily or lightly. It was not just a name, given to an ordinary man. He earned every letter that went to make up that proud and extraordinary title. His is a history beyond imagination that beggars description and is fascinating, transcending words.

Just think of it. One single man, who was pursued by 1,700 policemen of four states for 15 years in an area of approximately 8000 square miles. He was the victor of over 80 encounters with the police. And the cost of the operations, that eventually led to his death, was one and a half crores of rupees. In figures, this reads as Rs. 1,50,00,000. Or, if you should prefer to write it in another way, Rs. Fifteen millions of rupees! About one and one-eighth millions of pounds sterling spent on the elimination of just one man!

For his arrest, or his dead body, many rewards were offered, the highest being Rs. 15,000—well over pounds 1000 sterling!

Records and paperwork, dealing with his adventures his depredations, and his pursuit, were estimated to weigh over a tonne. He was directly responsible for more than 200 murders and a thousand acts of dacoity, pillage, ransom and raid.

But all the loot he was accused of having taken, both proved and unproved, did not amount to anywhere near half the sum of money the Government spent in trying to catch him.

And bear in mind always dear readers, this is not mere romancing. These are plain, hard, true facts .

There was nothing petty, mean, ignoble or churlish about this man. Everything was noble, brave, sporting and on a grand scale. Justice was something he not only preached, but lived and followed himself.

Read what the Bhind Morena Crime Inquiry Committee, appointed by the Government of the State of Madhya Bharat in 1953, has to say about this most unique personality:

'The case of Man Singh is representative of the peculiar problems of this area. He is reported to be a man with no private vices. Stories are told of him in hushed voices of admiration, of how he helps good causes, kills informers and policemen only when pursued, just lifts a few men who have money to spare, respects Brahmins who give him blessings, and occasionally coerces Zamindars to contribute to desirable objects like school buildings.

'His admirers often remark that he represents the high watermark of dacoity, nobly practised. Officers of revenue, customs and education departments could run into him without fear. He could join marriage celebrations attended by thousands of people. Now, however, he is on the run. His case represents how the natural repulsion against heinous offences can be mellowed by adopting ingenious methods. In the opinion of the Committee, the public attitude towards crime is as serious a matter, if not more serious, than the prevalence of crime itself.'

Remember, those words do not represent the ideas of any one person or of the writer. Verbatim, they are the findings of a Committee appointed by Government to inquire into the causes and nature of such crimes.

Man Singh was reported to be a strict teetotaller and vegetarian, living a life of abject simplicity, close to nature. His morals were unimpeachable. He robbed the rich, to help the poor.

He was deeply religious, and bathed in the river at break of dawn, singing sacred songs in the water where he would offer ablutions to the fiery ball of the rising sun as it peeped above the line of distant hills. Fresh from his bath, he would walk straight to the temple of the Goddess Kali and worship her devoutly. The string of large, amber beads he wore around his neck served the purpose of a rosary. He would count them while enchanting his prayers, and they never left his person night or day.

As part of his religious life, he built several temples, the money for which came from the loot he obtained when robbing the rich.

Many a temple, to this day, boasts a big brass bell, donated by the intrepid Rajah. You will find his name inscribed on them. It was his sincere belief that every time the bell was rung it would sound a prayer for him, if he was alive; or for his soul, if he was dead.

He donated schools, too, for the primary education of boys and girls; and 'chatrams' (or free shelters) for the aged, the poor and homeless, and the down-and-out.

There was one religious festival he would never omit to attend. It was held once a year, on a feast day, at the Bateshwar Nath Temple, and Man Singh never failed to be present on that day. Eventually, the police came to hear of it, and on that occasion they would surround the temple with a ring of uniformed men, and closely interrogate the thousands of pilgrims that would attend.

They knew that one among those thousands was the man for whom they were looking.

They would talk to the pilgrims and cross-examine them. Year after year, one of the men they might speak to, and question, would be the man they were so desperately in search of, the bandit leader, Rajah Man Singh. They knew it, but they did not know which was the man. How could they? He was too well disguised. And so, year by year and each year, he would literally slip from their fingers, only to be back again the following year, but with the same results.

Many an evening would he spend at a village, sitting in the open of the 'maidan' (grassy space), or on the doorstep of a house, smoking a clay pipe, the end of which he would hold to his lips with cupped hands, and talk to the villagers, discuss their problems, and help them with advice and money, when required.

The police knew this too, from information conveyed by their agents. But by the time they reached the spot, Man Singh would no longer be there. Evidently his spies—or more likely, his well-wishers—were as efficient as those on the police side. Perhaps more so. But he always just managed to elude their grasp.

A very human story is prevalent about him among the villagers of Bhind.

One evening, as the smoke of the village fires curled heavenward while cooking the evening meal of chappatties, Man Singh sat on the step of the Patel's (headman's) house, talking to the headman and several other villagers.

The Government, through the police, had engaged spies and informers on monthly salaries and had liberally distributed these

persons in all the villages, far and wide over the area. One of these individuals came to know of the dacoit's presence and hastened to inform the police. They surrounded the village and converged on the Patel's house. But, as was to be expected, Man Singh had vanished into thin air.

To say the least of it, the Inspector in charge of the police party was peeved. With scowling mien he confronted the Patel.

'Fool, and son of five generations of idiots, why did you not detain him, until we came?'

'Because, your honour, the man who could detain Rajah Man Singh has not yet been born.' The Patel spoke quietly, but there was an air of finality in his tone.

'Don't talk rubbish,' almost screamed the police officer, sweat running down his face from the heat, his exertions, and the rage he was in. He began to speak in short gasps. 'I can lock you up for harbouring this murderer,' he shouted, 'don't you know it is against the law, to aid and abet criminals?'

'I know that quite well, sir,' flatly returned the Patel, 'but I was neither aiding him, nor abetting him. It was just that Man Singh turned up at my house quite unexpectedly and spoke to me. What could I possibly do, sir? Arrest him?'

Then the Patel continued in a quizzical tone. 'You say that I can be locked up, by law, for talking to the Rajah. Tell me, your honour, suppose I had tried to detain Man Singh and had lost my life in doing so. Would the law give me another life?'

The Inspector nearly exploded. Then, just in time, he remembered he was nearing the age of retirement from service. The police doctor had advised him to 'take it easy' for the few months remaining before he would be relieved from duty. He was suffering from high blood pressure as it was, and carried far more weight than was good for him.

There was something, after all, in what the Patel had said, he mused. Neither the Government, nor the law would provide him with a second life. On the other hand, the former would swallow up his pension if he were to kill himself before his time through giving away to undue temper.

With all that, he could not refrain from calling Man Singh a very bad name.

Now, while all this was going on, the usual gaping crowd of villagers had assembled to see and hear all they could. Among them

was a young widow whose name was Jaya. Very recently, Man Singh had sent her some money through one of his lieutenants to pay her eldest son's examination fees, to enable him to appear for the school final examination.

She heard the bad word, and she resented it. Hot-headedly, and from the midst of the crowd, she spoke up, addressing the Inspector.

'You do not know him, sir, and hence you have no business to call him that name. Why, he is a benefactor of the poor. Although I had never seen him at any time, he generously sent me money to pay my son's examination fees when I did not have an anna in the house. May God bless him; and protect him from the likes of you.'

Jaya said the words in a rush and then remained quiet, as she realised the magnitude of her offence to this high-ranking police officer. There was utter silence as the crowd waited to see what would happen next.

The Inspector pushed the peak of his service cap upwards, tilting the hat to the back of his head. He looked at the widow closely .

She was middle-aged and rather tall, and still had a comely face. The determined set of her jaw well became her finely-chiselled countenance, and she stood erect, displaying a figure that indicated that, in her youth she must indeed have been a very attractive-looking girl.

'It is because of people like you,' he stormed, 'that we cannot apprehend this scoundrel. Instead of informing us where to find him, you assist him to escape from the clutches of the law?'

'Police Officer,' she said slowly and clearly, 'to you he may be a scoundrel; but to me he is a brother; a very, very dear brother.'

The Inspector wondered what he should do next. All around him were grinning faces. They were laughing at his discomfiture. It was quite evident to him that the whole population of this village, from the Patel downwards, stood behind the bandit-leader and would shelter and support him. They were openly exuberant at the disconcertion of the police posse. He would dearly enjoy beating every man jack of them. But, as that could not very well be done, the next best thing seemed to be to withdraw as gracefully as possible from the scene.

'Squad, fall in!' he ordered. The men fell in, in three ranks. 'Left turn; by the left, quick march.' And the police went away.

A certain old man with a white beard, moustache and whiskers, lying in a hayrick less than a hundred yards away, pulled the wisps of straw from his beard and face, as he watched the departing policemen benignly.

The widow lived in a hut not far away. It was the third turning to the left, as you went along the main street of the village; and her's was the sixth hut, again to the left.

The following day was the celebration of the Diwali festival. That night, there came a soft knocking on her door. Wondering who the caller might be at such a late hour, she timidly opened up, to see a tall and stately figure standing on her threshold, his noble countenance partly hidden in a white beard, whiskers and huge moustache.

'I am Man Singh,' he announced without hesitation. 'Yesterday, I heard you refer to me as your brother to that stout policeman. I have come to thank you for what you said to him, and to tell you that, indeed, I now look upon you as my sister. Please accept this little gift as a token of my esteem and affection. Henceforth, till the day of my death, no matter how far away I may be at the time, I will visit you on Diwali night, my sister.'

With the words he thrust some folded paper into her hands.

Jaya looked down to unfold the paper and see what it was.

Man Singh had given her five one hundred rupee notes.

She looked up to thank him with tears brimming in her eyes.

But he had gone.

Thereafter, every Diwali night, till the year of his death, Man Singh kept his promised tryst with Jaya the widow, who had called him her brother. And each time he gave her five hundred rupees.

The villagers say, in hushed whispers, that after his death Man Singh still visits Jaya on Diwali night. He comes as a spirit, but the money he leaves is real.

Man Singh organised and ruled his gangs of followers well, generously and justly. And there was always discipline amongst them.

The men knew their leader's noble disposition. They were afraid to commit any act that would reflect against the Rajah's, and thereby the gang's, own reputation.

Accounts were kept strictly, and all loot shared equitably.

In one skirmish with the police at a much later date, Tehsildar Singh, the dacoit leader's third son, was captured. On his person

was found a diary, which revealed that he served as the steward of the gang, inasmuch as all the day-to-day expenses incurred by them were noted in it. Reading through the items, the police were amazed to find that the dacoits paid for all the food they ate, and did not rob it. Each merchant had been reimbursed in cash for what had been purchased by the band.

Is it any wonder then, that wherever this amazing character went, he was greeted with the deepest respect and profound salaams? Everyone helped him, and no villager would betray or give information about his whereabouts or movements .

Some of the stories told about him may have been exaggerated. Rumours are always that way. But never was he accused, even by the police themselves, of a single act of rudeness to any poor man. Veritably and truly, he was the friend and succourer of the down-trodden.

Just like Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest fame in England, Man Singh was of aristocratic birth. He was a Rajput (which people are a martial clan of Hindus), and his birthplace was the village of Rathore Khera not far from Agra. The year he was born, 1890.

From young, Man Singh loved Nature and everything connected therewith. He revelled in the hard work of ploughing and sowing his fields, and the harvest was a delight and a period of thanksgiving to God, as he gathered in the golden grains of wheat. It was the reward of his labour. He loved each inch of the soil. No work was too hard for his rippling young muscles as he laboured bare-bodied beneath the tropical sun. Every night he would lay himself down to rest, sometimes still soiled with the grime of the day to fall asleep at once; exhausted, but very very happy.

In his spare moments, which were few and far between, he would stroll into the forest that skirted his fields. There he would sit in solitude under a spreading fig tree and hearken with harmony in his soul to the music of the birds of the wild; the plaintive call of peafowl, the harrying and worrying notes of the ‘brain-fever’ bird, the cheery crow of the jungle-cock both morning and evening, the peculiar sound made by nightjars at dusk and the mysterious and frightening hoot of the great horned owls at night. He asked nothing more from life than these things. He was simple; he was contented; and he was happy.

Bihari Singh, his father, was the village headman or patel. He was rich and lived comfortably with his two sons, Nawab Singh, the

elder, and Man Singh, the hard-working, peaceful farmer youth.

As with most other Indian boys romance and marriage were brought early into Man Singh's simple life in the form of a beautiful Rajput lass to whom he was married by his father while still very young. Through her, he had four sons—Jaswant Singh, Subedar Singh, Tehsildar Singh and Dhuman Singh; and one pretty daughter, whom he named Rani.

When he was only 24 years of age, he was elected as the Mukhiya of his village and made a member of the Agra District Board. The British Government at that time benefitted by his valuable help as a good and honourable citizen during the dark days of World War I. He was always an honest man.

But nothing gave him greater joy than the cultivation of his wide lands, and the income he derived from them more than rewarded him for his hard work.

His outstandingly tall figure, his affable personality, and the beard that he wore from young made him well-known and respected everywhere; both as Mukhiya when he arbitrated over village disputes, and as an active member of the District Board. He had an outstandingly lofty forehead, and on his head he would wear a large and high turban. These increased his physical height and imbued him with a dignified bearing.

Then Fate decided, by one of her quirks that things were going too well with this happy and contented family and started a chain of circumstances that eventually made this upright son of India into one of her most feared and dreaded brigands. Fate went even further than that. It made this man write his history in a queer mixture of chivalry and blood as the greatest dacoit of all time that the country had ever known and at the same time most benevolent.

Bihari Singh his father became engaged in litigation over some land with a man named Talfi Ram, a cunning and plotting Brahmin who was jealous of Bihari Singh's wealth and of Man Singh's increasing popularity and position.

The elder brother, Nawab Singh, had already left the family and was leading a peacefully nomad life in the jungles at this time.

Suddenly a dacoity occurred in the village. The word 'dacoity' signifies a raid accompanied by robbery and violence. In this case a baniya's (moneylender's) house was attacked at night, the baniya stabbed but not killed, and some money taken .

The malicious Talfi Ram falsely informed the police that the

nomad elder brother, Nawab Singb, had perpetrated the act, aided and sheltered by the father, Bihari Singh, who did not like the baniya because he was a friend of Talfi Ram. He also stated that Nawab Singh's brother, Man Singh, knew an about the raid and had assisted actively in it.

The police, as police all over the world will do, called both Bihari Singh and Man Singh to the station, closely interrogated them about the missing Nawab Singh, and warned them to be of good behaviour. Nothing more than that was done, because nothing could be proved. There was absolutely no evidence.

But old Bihari Singh, because he was innocent of the charge, took the incident greatly to heart as an irreparable insult to his family's honour and dignity. Young Man Singh supported his father wholeheartedly. His hot Rajput blood was up, and he determined to be avenged on the rascally Brahmin Talfi Ram and his whole family.

It was the fateful year 1928 when matters came to a head and the underlying feud burst into open conflict.

Man Singh went into the forest with his four sons, a relative named Roopa, and a large number of friends and well-wishers. There he joined his brother, Nawab Singh, who had been accused by Talfi Ram of perpetrating the original dacoity.

One night the combined party raided Talfi Ram's house. The Brahmin had been anticipating the attack and had hired some men, as mercenaries, to defend him. A bloody fight took place, in which Man Singh and his party eventually emerged victorious. Several of their opponents were killed and many wounded.

This single incident wiped out, for all time, Man Singh's name from its place of honour as a respectable, useful and law-abiding citizen. Instead, it was now inscribed in letters of blood and murder, as Man Singh the Dacoit, who was later to be hailed as the king of all dacoits.

The police acted quickly and creditably after that, and Man Singh and his whole party were arrested; only his brother, Nawab Singh, his eldest son, Jaswant Singh, and a nephew, Darshan Singh, escaping.

Man Singh was imprisoned for the first and last time in his existence. He was brought on trial and convicted to transportation for life.

As time passed and the tension died down, the three fugitives,

Nawab Singh, Jaswant Singh and Darshan Singh, occasionally and secretly visited old Bihari Singh in his house. Talfi Ram came to hear of these clandestine visits. He had sworn to be revenged after his recent defeat and had unobstrusively regathered his forces and friends to attain this purpose.

One day, while the three men were gathered in the house with the old father, Talfi Ram and his band counter-attacked, and a gun battle ensued. At the same time, very cleverly Talfi Ram sent word to the police for help, saying that the three fugitives were in town and trouble was afoot.

The police heard the shooting and concluding that the three wanted men were the aggressors, arrived at the spot as an armed posse. Meanwhile Talfi Ram and his followers had craftily faded from the scene, leaving the three fugitives inside the house and the police on the outside.

Foolishly, Nawab Singh and the other two men opened fire on the armed police. But they were outnumbered and out-gunned. Jaswant Singh, the eldest son, and Darshan Singh, the nephew, were shot dead. Nawab Singh was arrested, brought to trial, and also sentenced as a murderer to transportation for life.

Talfi Ram gloated over his revenge, which had been swift and highly successful.

There had been a Judas among Man Singh's relatives. A distant cousin, named Khem Singh, had deserted and gone over to join the Brahmin who had paid him for his betrayal. In fact, it was this man who had told Talfi Ram that the three fugitives were in the house with Bihari Singh, and had caused the counter-attack. He had also been the one to summon the police .

Man Singh nursed his revenge in his heart for ten long years. His home had been wrecked, the good name of his father, Bihari Singh, and that of the whole family irretrievably besmirched. No longer were they a household that was looked up to and respected. They were but a family of brigands and murderers. Worst of all, the old man, his father, was heartbroken.

The wily Brahmin, Talfi Ram, was responsible for it all. For the death of his son, Jaswant, and his nephew, Darshan Singh. And for sending him, and his brother, Nawab Singh, to jail for years upon end.

Yes; Talfi Ram was the cause of it all. Talfi Ram, and that other traitorous dog, Khem Singh, doubly a traitor because he belonged to

old Bihari Singh's family.

Man Singh made up his mind what he would do when he was released.

At last came the year 1938. Ten long years had passed while he had been in jail. During those ten years, Man Singh had been an exemplary convict, and one of the best behaved. He lived for revenge, and revenge only.

Because of his excellent conduct, he was released that year.

No sooner was he out of prison than he got entangled in disputes and open quarrels with the families of Talfi Ram and Khem Singh. Once more the police intervened. They warned him that he would be thrown into jail again. He was bound over to be of good behaviour for two years—up to May 1940. But Khem Singh was excused and went scot-free.

This added insult to injury, and yet more did Man Singh fret and fume. But he had now been taught the need for caution, and bided his time, behaving as a reformed citizen, till May 1940, which marked the expiry of the period for which he had been bound over to be of good behaviour.

At last the sun set on that glad day of May 31st, 1940. Man Singh was now a free person once more.

He waited just one short month to take his revenge.

On the night of 4th July, 1940, assisted by his remaining three sons, the faithful Roopa, and other relatives and friends, Man Singh launched a sudden attack on the houses of his two enemies.

Except for two women, Talfi Ram and his family, or such of them as were at home, were butchered; while Man Singh's youngest son, Dhuman Singh, personally cut off the heads of two of Khem Singh's close relations.

The die had been cast forever. There was now a barrier of blood and guilt between Man Singh and his followers, on the one hand, and law and society on the other—a barrier that could not be forgotten, surmounted, or circumvented. Henceforth, they were outlaws for ever and ever—and the feud that had started against mankind could only be expiated by the death of everyone of the outlaw band.

A person of lesser character would have quailed in the face of this inexorable fate. Everybody's hand was against him, thirsting for his blood. He was feared by all and hated by all. The police of four states were searching for him. He was a lost soul in a lost body.

Where should he go, where should he hide? How was he to eat and live? Nowhere could he seek employment; nowhere earn an honest living. His beloved fields, and his beloved home, father and wife were lost to him, forever. He was an outcast; thief, robber, murderer, dacoit!

Truly, most men would have succumbed through sheer fear, desperation and helplessness, to a fate such as lay ahead of him.

But Man Singh never flinched for one moment. He was made of sterner stuff than that. Indeed, he had guts and was veritably a man.

He merely accepted the situation for what it was worth and made the best out of it.

And that best was a very, very great deal, indeed.

From an insignificant outcast, he became, in 15 years, the greatest dacoit India has ever known. To emphasise that achievement, he came to be called throughout the peninsular as the King of Indian Dacaits. He started his career as an ordinary outlaw; hated, feared, and despised by everybody. He ended it by being respected, loved and even revered by millions throughout the length and breadth of the land. He ran away, penniless; but lived to donate money and temple bells, and to build schools and temples themselves. He fled from the scene of his acts of futile vengeance; but lived to save and help many others who, themselves had become the victims of revenge. He had done and still did, much harm; but he also lived to do very much good.

It is not for mortal and sinful men to judge Man Singh and his misdeeds. That supreme judgement is given only to the all-wise Creator who made Man Singh and knew why He had made him and allowed him to sin. But the whole of India acclaims and proclaims that Man Singh was, in veritable truth, a ‘man’ in every sense of the word—a man with unbounded courage and indomitable spirit.

Perhaps those who read his adventures may come to hold the same opinion.

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At the time, Man Singh embarked upon his career as a dacoit, four states of India converged on an area watered by three rivers. The states were Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh; and the rivers were the Chambal, the Kunwari and the

Jamuna.

The country was extremely broken and the land eroded. In between the ravines so formed flowed the three rivers named above, and their tributaries; mostly dry nullahs in the summer, but raging, impassable torrents of water when the rains came. It was wild country; wooded with scrub and interlaced by watercourses, furroughed ravines, and caves, covering an area of well over 8000 square miles.

For purposes of cultivation, the land and the soil were worthless. For purposes of sheltering a band of outlaws, who could hide in the caves, creep along the ravines, strike at their victims, and then vanish into thin air, the terrain was ideal.

Man Singh was a born general. He at once knew that among that maze of ravines, caves, dried waterways and thorny scrub, he and his followers would be safe from surprise attack. Paths were few, and they were tortuous. High grass grew everywhere. Few people, if any, came near the area. It seemed a land of the dead, fit for nothing but ghosts and ghouls and the huge horned owls that sailed soundlessly along the nullahs, seeking a rodent or a rabbit at night for prey.

But Man Singh made it his kingdom; a wide kingdom, forbidding and austere. Here he established his stronghold and headquarters, from where he launched his bands of dacoits upon raid after raid and in which it was very difficult for the police to ever dream of catching up with him.

As his fame and authority spread, more and more outlaws and vagrants were attracted to his banner. Dacoits who had hitherto carried on operations on their own initiative, now decided to throw in their lot with him. Some of them had already earned reputations that caused people to tremble at the very mention of their names. All of them were experienced. One by one, and in groups, they rallied to the standard of this new leader; whom they recognized as a man who possessed both the required strong personality and the organisational capacity to hold such a motley band of hard, cruel desperadoes, together.

Outstanding among his followers, we find the following names. Subedar Singh, Tehsildar Singh, who later became known as ‘the Terrible’, and Dhuman Singh, his remaining three sons; Charna, ‘the Ferocious’, who was to grow into his most able general, and Shyama, both dacoits who had hitherto been operating in the

United Provinces; Prithvi, Shankar and Dhawan, brigands from Rajasthan; Sultan, Lakhan Singh, 'the Lion', and Amrit Lal, from Madhya Bharat; Pratap and Devi Singh, from Vindhya Pradesh; and his old friend, distant relative and trusted follower, Roopa, 'the Faithful', who outlived him and still operates as a dacoit today.

Just as Robin Hood of England gathered his merry men around him in the fastnesses of Sherwood Forest, from where they would launch their raids and then vanish back into the little-known labyrinths; Man Singh of India gathered his band of outlaws, making the Chambal ravines as they were known, as famous as Sherwood Forest, because they came to shelter a man every bit as brave, and chivalrous, as Robin Hood of undying fame .

His initial attacks were still in pursuit of the old vendetta that had made him into a dacoit, and were directed against the residual members of the families of Talfi Ram and Khem Singh, which he started to systematically exterminate in cold blood. We are told that Khem Singh's relatives were finally completely wiped out with the murder of the last remaining grandson. There is no record as to whether the same fate befell the Brahmin's kinsmen, but the fact that they were never heard of again appears to indicate that it was so. Or perhaps the few that were left fled the area forever.

While this was happening, Man Singh's band of followers and desperadoes increased by leaps and bounds. And men cannot live on revenge. They require food. And food costs money. So Man Singh was forced to extend his raids merely to procure that commodity, money, which meant food and hence life, for all of them.

His initial plans were simple but intelligent. And back of them was the full force of his brain—a brain that had once been clever and devoted to constructive progress—now warped beyond repair, to revel in lawless adventure, and daring, atrocious brigandage.

From the very beginning, Man Singh revealed himself as an organiser of immense capacity and forethought, a strategist of outstanding merit and ability.

He split his gang into groups. One lot were just spies and informers. They would wander into villages and towns, noting who were rich and well-to-do persons. Later, they would kidnap them, or perhaps one of their sons or other beloved relative, and hold him to ransom in the fastnesses of the ravine kingdom.

The kidnapped person, be the zamindar, businessman or

landlord, or the heir of such a person, would be compelled to write a letter home to his relations, plainly stating he had been kidnapped and that the gang demanded ransom money. In addition he would have to say that, if the money was not paid within a stipulated period, he would most certainly be done to death.

Invariably the ransom was paid. People did not dare to report the matter to the police, because in any case the police were helpless, and could do nothing about it; while, if Man Singh came to know the police had been told, there was the great danger that the person held to ransom would be put to death at once.

Another group was formed to function as a striking force. The leader of this advance corps was the brigand named Charna. He earned the epithet of 'the Ferocious', and indeed he was the most merciless of all Man Singh's lieutenants. A fearless man, and an inherent tactician, he selected as the men who were to serve under him the most bloodthirsty and toughest members, whom he trained in jungle warfare and the use of tommy guns and modern equipment. He had been a soldier in his time and was given the choice of the best equipment in the possession of the band, which included hand-grenades, Sten guns, tommy guns, and .303 service rifles, all procured illegally along with vast stores of ammunition.

The 'spies' would inform the 'advance corps' who very often did the actual kidnapping.

Not only that, but Charna's men served as a commando unit in more senses than one. It was their duty to look out for police movements, and to counter-attack, ambush and harass them, and keep them engaged till the main body of dacoits could escape, or wolf around to surround the police and tackle them from the rear.

Tehsildar Singh, the third son, was the marksman of the band. He was an excellent sniper. Even in pitch darkness, he had taught himself to fire at the author of the slightest sound. Invariably that individual never made another sound in this life again.

Or Tehsildar would throw a stone near some police picket on a pitch-black night. The sentry would challenge, or open fire. Tehsildar would locate the spot where the challenge came from, or watch the flash from the policeman's rifle. The next second the sentry would be dead.

Lakhan Singh, called 'the Lion', and Devi Singh were two others among Man Singh's lieutenants who earned for themselves the reputation of being most ruthless, and daring beyond compare .

The great leader never went alone. Invariably he would be accompanied by a bodyguard with a tommy gun, sworn to protect and defend him at the cost of his own life.

There was always a spirit of good comradery among the members of the band; a spirit of honesty; faithfulness and loyalty; a spirit of genuine love and sacrifice for their popular chieftain, to safeguard whom, or at whose command, any member of the band would willingly and gladly lay down his own life at a moment's notice. In fact implicit obedience was one of the main factors that led to the gang being able to operate so successfully over such a great length of time.

To replenish their stock of firearms and ammunition, frequent raids were made by the band on police chowkies and outposts, whose inmates were exterminated and their equipment stolen. Other agents were employed solely to rob such weapons and ammunition, wherever and whenever they could, from army and police supplies and sources, or get them from deserters.

A trick often used, solely for the purpose of procuring firearms, would be for Charna and his band to force an encounter with a police patrol, when Charna would employ one or two dacoits only to engage the enemy. Fire would be exchanged, and then one of the dacoits would pretend to fall dead. The other, if there had been a companion, would act as if he was running away. The police patrol would advance upon the 'dead' man with the object of seeing if they could find any incriminating evidence in the way of documents or other information about the gang. upon his person. When they were well in the open, the rest of Charna's advance corps would enfilade them from all points and wipe them out. Then, of course, the rifles and other firearms they had been carrying, together with all their ammunition and equipment, would be robbed.

Man Singh and his men lived this self-chosen life of violence, pillage and murder, in the ravines of the river Chambal and its vicinity, camping in the open or hiding in caves, for years. But never once in all this time did he harm a villager, a poor man, or the petty merchants that kept him supplied with food. His prey were the zamindars, the rich landlords, and the haughty, arrogant moneylenders of the area. His avowed enemies were the police, and all their agents and secret informers.

During the whole period of his regime, he and his followers always behaved fairly and even generously with the working-class

folk and the humble, downtrodden farmers. Having been once a farmer himself, he was particularly partial to the poor agriculturists he encountered.

Thus it came to pass that he was looked upon as their best friend and saviour. They loved, respected and obeyed him. They would give no information that might betray his whereabouts. And many a time, when the police made a surprise attack, they would hide him and his followers in their own huts, inside their own granaries, even down their own wells. It was almost a case of the law and the police, on one side, versus the dacoits and the villagers on the other. The murders he committed were translated and glorified by the people into acts of commendable courage; and his robberies, as a means of justice, to wrest money from the rich and undeserving, with the purpose of feeding the poor and helpless.

When India gained independence in 1947, many criminals and convicts were released by the Government as an amnesty to celebrate the occasion. One of these was Nawab Singh, Man Singh's elder brother. The first thing this man did, upon coming out of jail, was to go to his old village, borrow a gun, kill the only two remaining relations of Talfi Ram and then join his redoubtable younger brother.

Not one soul now remained alive of the once large families of the Brahmin, Talfi Ram, or of Man Singh's own distant relative, Khem Singh, who had once betrayed him.

Man Singh and the members of his family that were with him had indeed taken an awful revenge.

Not content with wiping out both families, they then proceeded to mercilessly slaughter all who had been their adherents, their witnesses, their informers, and even their sympathisers.

The lust for revenge seemed to imbue Man Singh for some time after this. Not satisfied with having annihilated his personal enemies and their followers, he even went on to embark upon a campaign of retaliation on all who had stood witness against any of his dacoit band at any one time or another. These included the police, their secret agents, spies and informers, and the relatives of these people. They were also killed.

Even the magistrates in the land received warnings that they would be eliminated if they dared to institute any active measures against the band or any members who had been arrested and brought to trial.

The Military Take a Hand

Matters had now gone from bad to worse. With the latest policy of indiscriminate revenge that had been adopted by Man Singh and his men through systematically wiping out each and every police spy or informer, their relatives, and even sometimes innocent people suspected of having helped the police in some way or the other, directly or indirectly, action by the civil authorities became puerile and abortive. The regularly paid police agents either resigned, reported sick or absconded from their posts. Their terror became contagious and spread to the uniformed constables stationed at distant and isolated police chowkies, who felt they were beyond the pale of help from the authorities, who had evidenced complete inability to support or protect them, anyhow.

So they, in turn, deserted.

Conditions were growing chaotic.

Civil law and order had been brought to a standstill and became a laughing stock.

At this stage, Government decided to call upon the military for assistance, and small units of the regular army were stationed at strategic points.

It did not take very long for the dacoits, who had become increasingly self-confident, to clash with the military, and a number of gun battles and skirmishes ensued, with the result of many fatal casualties on both sides.

With all this, the power of Man Singh grew and grew, and the villagers loved him more and more. They refused point-blank to assist the military or the police in any way. The authorities found themselves in greater difficulties than ever before.

Man Singh had attained such heights of fame that, apart from the depredations committed directly by him and his henchmen, numerous lesser bands of maurauders, raiders and dacoits operating for hundreds of miles around became subservient to him. In return for the protection afforded by his name and often by members of his gang in person, they proudly proclaimed him their suzerain and punctiliously paid him from 10% to 25% of the loot and money they took in their raids. This payment was known as a ‘nazrana’ (tribute money), and not only enormously increased Man Singh’s exchequer, but his reputation soared to be regarded as almost that of an emperor among thieves. It extended over thousands upon

thousands of square miles, in all the affected areas of the four states converging in that region.

This last state of affairs stung the authorities to desperation, and the four governments concerned decided to pool their resources. They raised an army of policemen between them numbering 1,700 selected men, and committed them as a full-time job to wipe out the dreadful menace that had arisen. An experienced Deputy Inspector-General of Police was placed in charge of the whole operation, and hundreds of men from the C.I.D. branches of the police forces of all the states throughout India were distributed over the area, in villages big and small, to glean information about the bandits and their movements; particuiarly regarding their leader and his ravine stronghold.

This concerted effort did not take very long to gain its first result.

A police spy came to know that Charna, the Ferocious, intended to visit his wife in a certain village, upon a certain day.

The police laid a trap.

Unsuspectingly, Charna and some of his men entered the village. The police did nothing till they had gone right inside the house. Then about 60 of them surrounded it and tried to break the door in.

Charna found he was trapped and determined to sell his life dearly. From windows on the top storey of the building, the dacoits opened fire and the police returned it. For 24 hours a vigorous gun battle raged, but the 60 policemen were unable to advance a step further.

Desperately they called for help.

More police answered the call, and 400 especially trained policemen were sent to help the 60 policemen already there.

Inside the house were only 14 dacoits, and their chieftain, Charna.

Surrender was out of the question. The attackers fired volley after volley and even used tear-gas shells.

But the bandits returned their fire and held their own.

So the 460 policemen, after besieging the 15 dacoits for 3 whole days and nights, sent for military help.

An Army unit from the Dogra Regiment was sent to the spot, and an artillery detachment.

Two cannon shots were fired at the house at point-blank range, and the building collapsed. With a yell, the combined force of

soldiers and policemen charged into the debris.

There they found 14 dacoits, all dead. But not Charna.

Somehow, miraculously he had fled, while his loyal followers had laid down their lives to a man to cover his escape.

Little wonder then, that when so few men could fight over 33 times their number of better-equipped and trained regular policemen for 3 days, and only stopped fighting when they were killed by cannon fire, entirely in devotion to a petty chieftain; what must have been the loyalty, the respect, and the utter, selfless love which the main band of dacoits had for their leader, the matchless Rajah Man Singh Rathore, as he was now called.

This happened in 1951.

In 1953, Charna, once again at the head of the advance guard, ambushed and wiped out a police patrol. Unfortunately for him, that patrol had a portable wireless transmitter, and when the attack was launched had sent out a desperate S.O.S. for help. Police reinforcements from all directions, who had picked up the message, rushed to the assistance of the beleagured party, although they failed to arrive in time to save it .

But Charna did not know about the transmitter.

When the first of the reinforcements came on the scene, they were in time to see the dacoits relieving the dead bodies of the police patrol of their arms, ammunition and equipment. They opened fire, and the dacoits retaliated briskly.

More and more policemen arrived, and this time there was no friendly building to shelter the dacoits as they fought. They had ambushed the original police squad in the open; and now in turn they found themselves in the open, but surrounded.

Once again a grim gun battle was fought, and this time lasted for 10 hours. But the outlaws were at a disadvantage as they had but little cover, while the many police units that had arrived upon the scene poured in volley after volley upon the little band.

Ten hours later the sounds of gun and rifle fire subsided, and the smoke of battle gradually drifted from the scene.

It revealed Charna and nine of his outlaw band stretched dead upon the sward. Not one had escaped, this time.

The Fall of Man Singh

The death of Charna appeared to be a bad omen for Man Singh and his followers, and the forerunner of many evils to come, culminating with his own doom. Not only had the dacoit leader lost a very staunch and brave supporter, but the advance guard was now bereft of a chieftain who had been a strategist by natural gift and knew exactly when, and where to attack, and when not to. His successor had not these qualities and the advance unit soon began to run into serious trouble itself. Rather than continue to remain the most efficient striking force it had hitherto been under the leadership of the late Charna, it became an additional liability for Man Singh to look after.

In a skirmish shortly later several dacoits were seriously wounded, and one of the C.I.D. agents brought in word that these wounded men were to be moved at night from the caves where they had been kept in hiding, across the river Chambal, to a place called Etawah to be attended to by a doctor; and that Man Singh himself was in hiding in a ravine beside the Bhua Kher.

Large numbers of police surrounded the area in a huge circle and then slowly closed in upon the ravine where Man Singh was said to be. By midday they received notice of the presence of the dacoits when a solitary rifle shot broke the silence and a sergeant fell dead. Then a voice shouted, 'Come any closer, and your agent, Kama, who is a prisoner with us, will be shot.'

In reply to this the police began to crawl forward cautiously. Another single rifle shot broke the silence.

After that a sharp battle ensued. The outlaws employed hand-grenades, Sten guns, tommy guns and rifles, and the police used the same.

By weight of numbers the forces of law began to advance, and the outlaws broke and ran for safety. Man Singh and Roopa, firing tommy guns escaped down a connecting ravine. Others scrambled over the sides and rocks for safety. Tehsildar Singh, the bandit leader's third son—he who bore the title of 'the Terrible'—made a dash for liberty on horseback, but he and his mount were wounded. Later he was caught, and in his possession was a big-game rifle—a .500 bore double-barrelled black powder Express.

When the police searched the camp, they found their agent, Kama. The outlaws had carried out their threat. 'He had been shot

through the head. That was the second shot they had heard after being warned not to advance closer.

A domestic tragedy overtook the dacoit leader about this time. Lakhan Singh, who was called 'the Lion', had married Man Singh's daughter, Rani. But this girl proved unfaithful to her husband, and took unto herself a lover from among the dacoit band. This news infuriated Man Singh. It outraged his high ideals and his strict sense of justice. In the very presence of Rani, his daughter, he shot her paramour dead .

The old man had performed his duty as a father-in-law in keeping with the strictest principles of justice. But the shame of his daughter's conduct lived with him to his last day. And that same shame drove Lakhan Singh, her husband, who was also one of Man Singh's ablest lieutenants, to leave the band and go far away to operate and die on his own.

With the loss of these three very competent supporters, Man Singh suddenly grew tired and remorseful at the life he had been leading—a life of bloodshed, a life where he had no home to call his own, where he could never settle down and was always on the run; the restless life he had loved so dearly for so long but was now tired of following.

He wanted rest; he wanted peace; he wanted a home.

So he did a remarkable thing.

He offered the Government an amnesty.

He wrote a letter to the Government of India—unique in the annals of this country and, for the matter of that, of any country in the world. He began his letter by saying he was not a thief or murderer by choice, but fate and circumstances had forced him to be one. When he had not committed dacoity and was innocent, he had been called a dacoit and accused of a crime he had never done. He said the police had shamed and warned him without cause. So he had been compelled to punish the liar Talfi Ram, who had so blamed him. Now, however, he was willing to come back home and live a respectable life once again. He also went on to make what he termed a sporting offer to the Government. As a measure of his earnest desire to become a good and useful citizen of India, he stated that he and his band of dacoits would proceed to Goa, and free that foreign pocket by throwing the Portuguese out, and if necessary into the sea.

The Government of India did not reply. It could not negotiate

peace terms with a multi-murderer.

This disheartened Man Singh and demoralised his followers. Unrelentingly the police pursued them from hideout to hideout. One by one the outlaws were arrested, wounded or killed. Now many started deserting, the zeal and fight knocked out of them .

Finally, only 18 remained. Among them were Nawab Singh, his aged brother; Subedar Singh, his second son; and Roopa, the Faithful.

By this time Nawab Singh had become an old man, and his failing sight and physique often made him a burden to his companions. He begged his brother to abandon him. But the Rajah was not the sort of man to desert a friend, far less his own elder brother. He kept Nawab Singh with him to the very end.

Although depleted in numbers, Man Singh resolved that the reputation of his followers should never be sullied. He committed dacoity after dacoity upon the rich, while his fame for generosity and kindness towards the poor increased yet more.

The authorities were almost berserk. The 1,700 uniformed policemen searching for him, and the horde of plain-clothed C.I.D. detectives were stirred to greater efforts.

But Man Singh and his remaining 18 outlaws continued their depredations.

On a day in November, 1954, the Home Minister of Madhya Bharat, Mr. Dixit, undertook to resign from the State Cabinet if Man Singh was not brought to book within a year from that day. To accomplish this, he called upon those most famous fighting men of India, the Gurkhas, to help him. He raised a special company, comprised entirely of these hardy hill soldiers, to eliminate Man Singh, who had become a curse to the four states in which he had eluded all efforts to catch him.

Things became more and more hot for the quarry now, so that Man Singh adopted a ruse. A cremation was held in an obscure village with a corpse dressed up to resemble him and the rumour was circulated that the old brigand had died of a sudden illness and had been cremated, according to custom.

The authorities and the police were jubilant. The rich zamindars and landlords and oppressors of the poor slept soundly in relief. The humble and harassed wept bitter tears at the loss. There was a lull in the pursuit .

After some time, Man Singh struck again. Indeed, he was alive

in right earnest and had fooled the authorities thoroughly.

Many who believed he had really died were now convinced he had come to life again. This bestowed upon the Rajah a reputation of being immortal.

The police took up the pursuit once more and the crack Gurkha company went into action.

Man Singh was traced to a hideout in the Morena district which the police besieged at dawn. Heavy firing continued all day till nightfall, when the outlaws retreated, leaving a good quantity of arms and ammunition, including Sten guns behind them. Man Singh was supposed to have been wounded in this battle, but he made good his escape.

The forces of authority followed harder than ever on his trail. For seven months after that, from February to August, 1955, they relentlessly hounded him from pillar to post. By the middle of August they had him literally sealed up in the ravines of the Chambal River. All outlets were guarded.

The Last Glorious Fight

Somehow this amazing man and his 18 followers got clean through the police net. He escaped to the district of Bhind and tried to cross the Kunwari River.

Here Fate played him a cruel trick. The Kunwari was in full flood and totally unfordable. Man Singh and his band fled back to the village of Bijapur, and the crack company of Gurkhas, under the command of an officer named Chaihale, pursued him.

Man Singh fired the first shot; and the last battle of his brilliant, but criminal career, was fought.

A platoon of the warlike Gurkhas, led by one of their own countrymen, Jamadar Bhanwar Singh, attacked; and the fight was fast and furious. Guns rifles, tommy guns, Sten guns and grenades were freely used. Man Singh himself a crack shot, accounted for many of his foes, and thousands of rounds were fired .

But his time had come and the Great Reaper, whom he had eluded so often, claimed him at last. The most illustrious dacoit of all time fell to earth, his body riddled with bullets.

With a hurrah of victory, the sturdy little Gurkhas rushed forward to take his corpse.

But there was yet an epic to be enacted in this great battle

before it was finally over.

The dacoits counter-attacked vigorously to prevent the earthly remains of their beloved leader from falling into the hands of the foe. The fight waged more furious than ever.

Then from the ranks of the outlaws rushed forth a stalwart figure, red with his own lifeblood that streamed from many wounds, while tears flowed unrestrainedly down his leathery dark cheeks and on to his beard.

It was Subedar Singh, valiant second son of the stricken leader. He rushed to cover his father's body with his own so that it should not receive any more bullets.

And he succeeded in his purpose.

Riddled himself with rifle, tommy gun and Sten gun bullets, he fell dead over the corpse of his beloved father, to protect it in death.

The battle was over. Roopa, the Faithful, badly wounded, was able to get the aged Nawab Singh away, together with a handful of those remaining alive.

But most lay dead on the field of that last and most glorious fight.

Even the little Gurkhas, men of war and blood that they were, stood mutely in respect before those huddled corpses. Then, one by one, they saluted the dead with honour; the esteem of gallant men for one another!

The police were again jubilant. The public throughout India rejoiced. The newspapers announced the victory, in leading headlines.

Mr. Dixit, the Home Minister, had kept his pledge; and so he did not have to resign. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru; Home Minister, Pant, of the Central Government; and the Congress President, Mr. Dhebar, were informed by telegram, and were relieved .

While the poor throughout the land, whom Man Singh had loved and defended, and who loved him in return, wept bitterly.

Dr. Sampurnanand, Chief Minister of the United Provinces, issued this announcement:

'It is not a very happy thing to express joy over the death of a person. Man Singh is dead, and the people who were awestricken on account of the depredations of Man Singh and his gang, have heaved a sigh of relief.'

But the sighs and the tears of widows and children, and the

incense and the prayers of the temple priests, and the chimes of the bells that Man Singh had donated, went up to God for his soul, throughout the land.

The Last Rites

The police brought the bullet-riddled bodies of the great leader and his staunch son, under heavy armed guard, to the town of Bhind. Their bodies were tied to charpoys (cots made of a wooden frame, interlaced with rope), and exposed in a standing position for the public to gaze upon. It is estimated that over 40,000 people filed past the dead men. Some of these did so out of a morbid curiosity; some out of joy and relief. But thousands who paid their last homage cried openly and bitterly, like children.

From there, the corpses were taken to Gwalior City for cremation. Man Singh's widow petitioned the Government by telegram that the bodies of her husband and son be given to her, as a matter of justice, so that she could perform the last rites. From jail, Tehsildar Singh, the third son, begged Government to allow him to light his father's funeral pyre and to put the ceremonial fire in his mouth. This ceremony is called the 'mukhagni', and is the final bounden duty enjoined upon a surviving son towards his father at the latter's death.

Both petitions were refused.

That last day another 60,000 people filed past the dead bodies at Gwalior City to pay their final respects. The hushed silence was broken by the hum and murmur of prayers for the departed spirits of the brave father and son, and throbbed to the sound of sobbing. Tears flowed freely, many of them to fall on the mute remains of the beloved brigand. People bent low to salaam him. Ex-soldiers and pensioners from all branches of the Services turned out in full uniform, wearing their war medals. The red coats, supplied by the British to their Indian soldiers before World War I were conspicuous on these veterans of long ago. Many of them were very old men, who had fought India's wars valiantly in the dim past. They knew what bravery and loyalty meant.

In the broiling sun, they joined the slowly-moving queue. When finally they stood before the dead body of the great leader, those frail and bent old backs were frail and bent no longer. They grew upright, as if once again on parade. The old, stooping shoulders

squared. The medals, earned so long ago, flashed in the sunlight once again as the aged feet clicked together, at attention. The feeble right arms, trembling a little perhaps, went up to the salute and remained there for a full minute. Tears they could not restrain brought salt to their lips as they murmured, ‘Farewell, Maharajah Sahib! May God rest your brave soul in peace.’

Then they shuffled on to the corpse of Subedar Singh. Once more the stiffening of the aged limbs; once again the click of heels and the salute; this time the words, ‘Salaam, Subedar Sahib! Loyal and brave son of your father, we salute you!’

Under close armed police guard, both bodies were then cremated, the guard remaining while the flames licked hungrily at the piled wood surrounding the mortal remains of gallant father and son; while they hissed and crackled; and while the smoke went up in heavy yellow spirals; and even till such time as it died down again, leaving only the glowing embers and the ashes to mark the spot where two famous bodies, of two kindred souls, had stood.

People said it looked as if the police feared that the terrible father and his equally terrible son, might suddenly become alive again and escape once more from their very midst .

And that was how the greatest bandit leader India has ever known, came into being, and lived, and died.

He was a thief and murderer, no doubt; but also a gentleman to his fingertips. His prey; the rich. His enemies; the police and informers. He counted his friends by the thousands amongst the very very poor of the land. Never once did he harm a woman or child; never once did he owe any man an anna without repaying the debt; never once did he rob a person who could not afford it. And at the very end he, and his beloved son, Subedar, remained united in gallantry; and died as they had lived, as heroes.

We do not condone the murders and brigandage he committed. We condemn those actions. It was not for him to have taken the law into his own hands. His revenge against, and murder of the enemies of his family, was wrong. For his misdeeds he was rightly punished by the loss of his life.

But as a living legend of India for all time; a very Robin Hood of the East; for his chivalry, his generosity, the magnitude of his nature, and his big-heartedness and bravery and sheer grit, in the face of insuperable difficulties, hazards and dangers, and his tenacity and determination, let us always respect him and never

forget him. Let us keep a corner also in our memories for that loyal son who sought to shield the dead body of his father with his own live body, and succeeded at the cost of his life.

Let us join with those little Gurkhas on the field of battle that day; and with those ex-soldiers and pensioners who filed past in Gwalior City; by saying, ‘Salaam, Rajah Sahib and Subedar Sahib! Illustrious father and loyal son. We salute you both and shall remember you.’

Epilogue

Even as the writing of these tales comes to a close, news is to hand that Roopa, the Faithful, staunch follower and a relative of the Rajah, is still at liberty and operating his trade as a dacoit.

In the next paragraph is the copy of a Press Report, dated 1st January, 1959.

DACOIT ROOPA KILLS 4

'GWALIOR, Jan. 1, 1959. Roopa, notorious dacoit and chief lieutenant of dacoit Man Singh, last night shot dead three persons and fatally injured another in a village in Morena District, according to a report reaching here this morning. The fourth succumbed to his injuries after he had been removed to hospital.'